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THE

WORKS

OF

DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

THO^{s}. BIRCH, M. A.

ALSO,

A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY COMPARED.

IN TEN VOLUMES.—VOL. III.

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SERMONS,

&c.

DEDICATION

TO THE FOLLOWING SERMON.

TO THE WORSHIPFUL

THE MASTERS OF THE BENCH,

AND

THE REST OF THE GENTLEMEN OF THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S-INN.

THOUGH I was at first very unwilling to expose to the public a sermon made upon so little warning, and so great an occasion; yet upon second thoughts, I could not think it fit to resist the unanimous and earnest request of so many worthy persons, as the Masters of the Bench of this Honourable Society; to whom I stand so much indebted for your great and continued respects to me, and kind acceptance of my labours among you for now above the space of five-and-twenty years. In a most grateful acknowledgment whereof, this discourse, such as it is, in mere obedience to your commands, is now humbly presented to you, by

Your most obliged and
Faithful servant,

JOHN TILLOTSON.

Feb. 28, 1688-9.

SERMON XXXII.

[A Thanksgiving-Sermon for our Deliverance by the Prince of Orange. Preached at Lincoln's-Inn Chapel, Jan. 31, 1688.]

And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such a deliverance as this: Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations; wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?—EZRA ix. 13, 14.

I AM sufficiently aware, that the particular occasion of these words is, in several respects, very different from the occasion of this day's solemnity: for these words were spoken by Ezra, at a time appointed for public and solemn humiliation. But I shall not now consider them in that relation, but rather as they refer to that great deliverance, which God had so lately wrought for them; and as they are a caution to take heed of abusing great mercies received from God:—and so they are very proper and pertinent to the great occasion of this day. Nay, these words even in the saddest aspect are not so unsuitable to it. For we find in Scripture, upon the most solemn occasions of humiliation, that good men have always testified a thankful sense of the goodness of God to them. And, indeed, the mercy of God doth then appear above measure merciful, when the sinner is most deeply sensible of his own

vileness and unworthiness. And so Ezra, here, in the depth of their sorrow and humiliation, hath so great a sense of the greatness of their deliverance, that he hardly knew how to express it: "And hast given us such a deliverance as this!" And, on the other hand, we find that good men in their most solemn praises and thanksgivings, have made very serious reflections upon their own unworthiness. And surely the best way to make men truly thankful, is first to make them very humble. When David makes his most solemn acknowledgments to God for his great mercies to him, how doth he abase himself before him? "But who am I, and what is my people?" And so likewise after he had summoned all the powers and faculties of his soul to join in the praises of God, he interposeth this seasonable meditation—"He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." The greater and more lively sense we have of the goodness of God to us, the more we shall abhor ourselves in dust and ashes: nothing being more apt to melt us into tears of repentance, than the consideration of great and undeserved mercies vouchsafed to us. The goodness of God doth naturally lead to repentance.

1 Chron. xxix. 14.

Psal. ciii. 10.

Having thus reconciled the text to the present occasion, I shall, for the more distinct handling of the words, take notice of these two parts in them.

First, Here is a case supposed; Should we, after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and since God hath punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hath given us such a deliverance as this; should we again break his commandments?

Secondly, Here is a sentence and determination in the case; "Wouldest thou not be angry with us till

thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" This is not spoken doubtfully, though it be put by way of question; but is the more vehemently positive, the more peremptorily affirmative; as if he had said, it cannot otherwise be in reason expected, but that after such repeated provocations, God should be angry with us till he had consumed us.

I. First, Here is a case supposed; Should we, after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass; and since God hath punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hath given us such a deliverance as this: should we again break his commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? In which words these following propositions seem to be involved, which I shall but just mention, and pass to the second part of the text.

1. That sin is the cause of all our sufferings; "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass." Our evil deeds bring all other evils upon us.

2. That great sins have usually a proportionable punishment; "after all that is come upon us," there is the greatness of our punishment; "for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass," there is the greatness of our sin. But when I say that great sins have a proportionable punishment; I do not mean that any temporal punishments are proportionable to the great evil of sin; but that God doth usually observe a proportion in the temporal punishments of sin; so that although no temporal punishment be proportionable to sin, yet the temporal punishment of one sin holds a proportion to the punishment of another; and, consequently, lesser and greater sins have proportionably a lesser and greater punishment.

3. That all the punishments which God inflicts in this life do fall short of the demerit of our sins; "and seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." In the Hebrew it is, "and hast kept down our iniquities;" that is, that they should not rise up against us. The LXX. expresseth it very emphatically—"thou hast eased us of our sins;" that is, thou hast not let the whole weight of them fall upon us. Were it not for the restraints which God puts upon his anger, and the merciful mitigations of it, the sinner would not be able to bear it, but must sink under it. Indeed, it is only said in the text, that the punishment which God inflicted upon the Jews, though it was a long captivity, was beneath the desert of their sins: but yet it is universally true, and Ezra perhaps might intend to insinuate so much, that all temporal punishments, though never so severe, are always less than our iniquities deserve.

4. That God many times works very great deliverances for those who are very unworthy of them; and hath given us such a deliverance as this, notwithstanding our evil deeds, and notwithstanding our great trespass.

5. That we are but too apt, even after great judgments, and after great mercies, to relapse into our former sins; "should we again break thy commandments." Ezra insinuates that there was great reason to fear this, especially considering the strange temper of that people, who, when God multiplied his blessings upon them, were so apt to "wax fat and kick against him;" and though he had cast them several times into the furnace of affliction, though they were melted for the present, yet they were many times but the harder for it afterwards.

6. That it is good to take notice of those parti-

cular sins which have brought the judgments of God upon us. So Ezra does here; "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass;" and, "should we again join in affinity with the people of these abominations."

II. Secondly, Here is a sentence and determination in the case; "Wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" Which question, as I said before, doth imply a strong and peremptory affirmative; as if he had said, After such a provocation there is great reason to conclude, that God would be angry with us till he had consumed us.

From whence the observation contained in this part of the text will be this, That it is a fearful aggravation of sin, and a sad presage of ruin to a people, after great judgments and great deliverances, to return to sin, and especially to the same sins again. Hear how passionately Ezra expresses himself in this case: (ver. 6.) "I am ashamed, O my God, and blush to lift up mine eyes to thee, my God." Why? what was the cause of this great shame and confusion of face? He tells us, (ver. 9.) "For we were bondmen, yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended his mercy to us, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem;" that is, to restore to them the free and safe exercise of their religion. Here was great mercy and a mighty deliverance indeed; and yet after this they presently relapsed into a very great sin: (ver. 10.) "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments."

In handling of this observation, I shall do these two things:

First, I shall endeavour to shew, That this is a very heavy aggravation of sin; and,

Secondly, That it is a fatal presage of ruin to a people.

First, It is a heavy aggravation of sin, after great judgments, and after signal mercies and deliverances, to return to sin, and especially to the same sins again. Here are three things to be distinctly spoken to.

1. That it is a great aggravation of sin to return to it after great judgments.

2. To do this after great mercies and deliverances.

3. After both to return to the same sins again.

1. It is a great aggravation of sin, after great judgments have been upon us, to return to an evil course: because this is an argument of great obstinacy in evil. The longer Pharaoh resisted the judgments of God, the more was his wicked heart hardened, till at last he arrived at a monstrous degree of hardness; having been, as the text tells us, hardened under ten plagues. And we find that after God had threatened the people of Israel with several judgments, he tells them, that if they "will not be reformed by all these things, he will punish them seven times more for their sins." And if the just God will in such a case punish seven times more, we may conclude that the sin is seven times greater.

Lev. xxvi. 23.

What sad complaints doth the prophet make of the people of Israel growing worse for judgments: "Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, children that have been corrupters, a seed of evil doers." He can hardly find

Isa. i. 4.

words enough to express how great sinners they were; and he adds the reason in the next verse, "Why should they be smitten any more? they will revolt more and more." They were but the worse for judgments. This renders them a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity." And again, "The people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts; therefore his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." And the same prophet further complains to the same purpose, "When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see." There is a particular brand set upon King Ahaz, because affliction made him worse: "This is that King Ahaz," that is, that grievous and notorious sinner. And what was it that rendered him so? "In the time of his distress he sinned yet more against the Lord: this is that King Ahaz," who is said to have provoked the Lord "above all the kings of Israel which were before him."

Verse 5. Isa. ix. 13. Isa. xxvi. 11. 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

2. It is likewise a sore aggravation of sin, when it is committed after great mercies and deliverances vouchsafed to us: because this is an argument of great ingratitude. And this we find recorded as a heavy charge upon the people of Israel, that "they remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side; neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal;" namely, Gideon, who had been their deliverer, "according to all the goodness which he had shewed to Israel." God, we see, takes it very ill at our hand, when we are ungrateful to the instruments of our deliverance; but much more when we are unthankful to him the

Judg. viii. 34, 35.

author of it. And how severely doth Nathan the prophet reproach David upon this account? "Thus said the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hand of Saul," &c. "And if this had been too little, I would moreover have done" such and such things. "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" God here reckons up his manifold mercies and deliverances, and aggravates David's sin upon this account. And he was very angry likewise with Solomon for the same reason, "Because he had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." However we may slight the mercies of God, he keeps a punctual and strict account of them. It is particularly noted, as a great blot upon Hezekiah, that "he returned not again according to the benefits done unto him." God takes very severe notice of all the unkind and unworthy returns that are made to him for his goodness.

1 Kings xi. 9.

2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

Ingratitude to God is so unnatural and monstrous, that we find him appealing against us for it to the inanimate creatures. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me." And then he goes on and upbraids them with the brute creatures, as being more grateful to men, than men are to God. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people doth not consider." And in the same prophet there is the like complaint: "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the

Isa. i. 2.

Verse 3.

Isa. xxvi. 10.

majesty of the Lord. Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see and be ashamed." They that will not acknowledge the mercies of God's providence, shall feel the strokes of his justice.

There is no greater evidence in the world of an untractable disposition, than not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercies, not to be obliged by benefits, nor to be tamed by gentle usage. Nay, God expects that his mercies should lay so great an obligation upon us, that even a miracle should not tempt us to be unthankful. "If there arise among you a prophet," says Moses to the people of Israel, "or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder cometh to pass, whereof he spake to thee, saying, Let us go after other gods and serve them; thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet." And he gives the reason, "Because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord God of Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and delivered you out of the house of bondage." Deut. xiii. 1, 2. Verse 5.

3. It is a greater aggravation yet, after great mercies and judgments to return to the same sins. Because this can hardly be without our sinning against knowledge, and after we are convinced how evil and bitter the sin is which we were guilty of, and have been so sorely punished for before. This is an argument of a very perverse and incorrigible temper, and that which made the sin of the people of Israel so above measure sinful, that after so many signal deliverances, and so many terrible judgments, they fell into the same sin of murmuring ten times; murmuring against God the author, and against Moses the glorious instrument of their deliverance out of

Egypt; which was one of the two great types of the Old Testament, both of temporal and spiritual oppression and tyranny. Hear with what resentment God speaks of the ill returns which they made to him for that great mercy and deliverance: "Because all these men which have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers." And after he had brought them into the promised land, and wrought great deliverances for them several times, how does he upbraid them with their proneness to fall again into the same sin of idolatry? "And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites; from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also and the Amalekites and Maonites did oppress you: and ye cried unto me, and I delivered you out of their hand: yet you have forsaken me, and served other gods; wherefore I will deliver you no more: go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen, let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." This incensed God so highly against them, that they still relapsed into the same sin of idolatry, after so many afflictions and so many deliverances. Upon such an occasion well might the prophet say, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy sins shall reprove thee: know therefore that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." It is hardly possible but we should know that the wickedness for which we have been so severely corrected, is an evil and bitter thing.

Numb. xiv. 22.

Judg. x. 11, 12, 13, 14.

Jer. ii. 19.

Thus much for the first part of the observation; namely, that it is a fearful aggravation of sin, after great judgments and great deliverances, to return to sin, and especially to the same sins again. I proceed to the

Second Part; namely, That this is a fatal presage of ruin to a people: "Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations; wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" And so God threatens the people of Israel in the text which I cited before, "Wherefore I will deliver you no more." Wherefore; that is, because they would neither be reformed by the afflictions wherewith God had exercised them, nor by the many wonderful deliverances which he had wrought for them. Judg. x. 13.

And there is great reason, why God should deal thus with a people that continues impenitent both under the judgments and mercies of God.

1. Because this doth ripen the sins of a nation; and it is time for God to put in his sickle when a people are ripe for ruin. When the measure of their sins is full, it is no wonder if the cup of his indignation begin to overflow. It is said of the Amorites, four hundred years before God brought that fearful ruin upon them, that God deferred the extirpation of them, because "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." When neither the mercies nor the judgments of God will bring us to repentance, we are then fit for destruction; according to that of the apostle, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and make his power known, endured with Gen. xv. 16. Rom. ix. 22.

much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" They who are not wrought upon neither by the patience of God's mercies, nor by the patience of his judgments, seem to be fitted and prepared, to be ripe and ready for destruction.

2. Because this incorrigible temper shews the case of such persons to be desperate and incurable: "Why should they be smitten any more?" says God of the people of Israel; "they will revolt more and more." "How often would I have gathered you," says our blessed Saviour to the Jews, "even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate;" that is, ye shall be utterly destroyed; as it happened forty years after to Jerusalem, and to the whole Jewish nation.

Isa. i. 5.

Matth. xxiii. 37, 38.

When God sees that all the means which he can use do prove ineffectual, and to no purpose, he will then give over a people, as physicians do their patients when they see that nature is spent, and their case past remedy. When men will not be the better for the best means that heaven can use, God will then leave them to reap the fruit of their own doings, and abandon them to the demerit of their sin.

That which now remains is, to apply this to ourselves, and to the solemn occasion of this day.

And if this be our case, let us take heed that this be not also our doom and sentence.

First, The case in the text doth very much resemble our's: and that in three respects—God hath sent great judgments upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespasses; he hath punished us less than our iniquities have deserved; and hath given us a very great and wonderful deliverance.

1. God hath inflicted great judgments upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespasses. Great judgments, both for the quality and for the continuance of them. It shall suffice only to mention those which are of a more ancient date. Scarce hath any nation been more calamitous than this of our's, both in respect of the invasions and conquests of foreigners, and of our own civil and intestine divisions. Four times we have been conquered, by the Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans. And our intestine divisions have likewise been great and of long continuance: witness the barons' wars, and that long and cruel contest between the two houses of York and Lancaster.

But to come nearer to our own times, what fearful judgments and calamities of war, and pestilence, and fire, have many of us seen? And how close did they follow one another? What terrible havoc did the sword make amongst us for many years? And this not the sword of a foreign enemy, but of a civil war; the mischiefs whereof were all terminated upon ourselves, and have given deep wounds, and left broad scars upon the most considerable families in the nation.

——*Alta manent civilis vulnera dextræ.*

This war was drawn out to a great length, and had a tragical end, in the murder of an excellent king; and in the banishment of his children into a strange country, whereby they were exposed to the arts and practices of those of another religion; the mischievous consequences whereof we have ever since sadly laboured under, and do feel them at this day.

And when God was pleased in great mercy at last to put an end to the miserable distractions and confusions of almost twenty years, by the happy restoration of the royal family, and our ancient government; which seemed to promise to us a lasting settlement, and all the felicities we could wish; yet how soon was this bright and glorious morning overcast, by the restless and black designs of that sure and inveterate enemy of our's, the church of Rome, for the restoring of their religion among us. And there was too much encouragement given to this design, by those who had power in their hands, and had brought home with them a secret good-will to it.

For this great trespass, and for our many other sins, God was angry with us, and sent among us the most raging pestilence that ever was known in this nation, which in the space of eight or nine months swept away near a third part of the inhabitants of this vast and populous city, and of the suburbs thereof; besides a great many thousands more in several parts of the nation. But we did not return to the Lord, nor seek him for all this.

And therefore, the very next year after, God sent a terrible and devouring fire; which in less than three days time laid the greatest part of this great city in ashes. And there is too much reason to believe that the enemy did this, that perpetual and implacable enemy of the peace and happiness of this nation.

And even since the time of that dreadful calamity, which is now above twenty years agone, we have been in a continual fear of the cruel designs of that party, which had hitherto been incessantly working under ground, but now began to shew themselves more

openly; and especially since a prince of that religion succeeded to the crown, our eyes have been ready to fail us for fear, and for looking after those dreadful things that were coming upon us, and seemed to be even at the door. A fear which this nation could easily have rid itself of, because they that caused it were but a handful in comparison of us, and could have done nothing without a foreign force and assistance; had not the principles of humanity, and of our religion too, restrained us from violence and cruelty, and from every thing which had the appearance of undutifulness to the government which the providence of God had set over us. An instance of the like patience, under the like provocations, for so long a time, and after such visible and open attempts upon them, when they had the laws so plainly on their side, I challenge any nation or church in the world, from the very foundation of it, to produce. Insomuch, that if God had not put into the hearts of our kind neighbours, and of that incomparable prince, who laid and conducted that great design with so much skill and secrecy, to have appeared so seasonably for our rescue, our patience had infallibly, without a miracle, been our ruin. And I am sure, if our enemies had ever had the like opportunity in their hands, and had over-balanced us in numbers but half so much as we did them, they would never have let it slip; but would long since have extirpated us utterly, and have made the remembrance of us to have ceased from among men.

And now, if you ask me, for what sins more especially God hath sent all these judgments upon us? It will not, I think, become us to be very particular and positive in such determinations. Thus much is certain, that we have all sinned and contributed

to these judgments; every one hath had some hand, more or less, in pulling down this vengeance upon the nation. But we are all too apt to remove the meritorious cause of God's judgments as far as we can from ourselves, and our own party, and upon any slight pretence to lay it upon others.

Yet I will venture to instance in one or two things which may probably enough have had a more particular and immediate hand in drawing down the judgments of God upon us.

Our horrible contempt of religion on the one hand, by our infidelity and profaneness, and our shameful abuse of it on the other, by our gross hypocrisy, and sheltering great wickedness and immoralities under the cloak and profession of religion.

And then great dissensions and divisions, great uncharitableness and bitterness of spirit among those of the same religion; so that almost from the beginning of our happy Reformation the enemy had sown these tares; and by the unwearied malice and arts of the church of Rome, the seeds of dissension were scattered very early amongst us; and a sour humour had been fermenting in the body of the nation, both upon account of religion and civil interests, for a long time before things broke out into a civil war.

And more particularly yet: that which is called the great trespass here in the text, their "joining in affinity with the people of these abominations," by whom they had been detained in a long captivity: this, I say, seems to have had, both from the nature of the thing, and the just judgment of God, no small influence upon a great part of the miseries and calamities which have befallen us. For had it not been for the countenance which popery had by the mar-

riages and alliances of our princes, for two or three generations together, with those of that religion, it had not probably had a continuance among us to this day. Which will, I hope, now be a good warning to those, who have the authority to do it, to make effectual provision by law, for the prevention of the like inconvenience and mischief in this nation for ever.

2. Another parallel between our case and that in the text, is, that God hath punished us less than our iniquities did deserve. And this acknowledgment we have as much reason to make for ourselves, as Ezra had to do it in behalf of the Jews; "thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." "Thou our God hast punished us;" there is the reason of so much mercy and mitigation. It is God, and not man, with whom we have to do; and therefore it is, that we the children of men are not consumed. And it is our God likewise, to whom we have a more peculiar relation, and with whom, by virtue of our profession of Christianity, we are in covenant: "thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." He might justly have poured forth all his wrath, and have made his jealousy to have smoked against us, and have blotted out the remembrance of us from under heaven: he might have given us up to the will of our enemies, and into the hands of those whose tender mercies are cruelty: he might have brought us into the net which they had spread for us, and have laid a terrible load of affliction upon our loins, and suffered insolent men to ride over our heads, and them that hated us with a perfect hatred, to have had the rule over us: but he was graciously pleased to remember mercy in the midst of judgment, and to repent himself for his servants, when

he saw that their power was gone, and that things were come to that extremity, that we were in all human probability utterly unable to have wrought out our own deliverance.

3. The last parallel between our case and that in the text, is, the great and wonderful deliverance which God hath wrought for us. And whilst I am speaking of this, "God is my witness whom I serve in the gospel of his Son," that I do not say one word upon this occasion in flattery to men, but in true thankfulness to Almighty God, and constrained thereto from a just sense of his great mercy to us all in this marvellous deliverance, in this mighty salvation which he wrought for us. So that we may say with Ezra, "Since thou our God hast given us such a deliverance as *this:*" so great, that we know not how to compare it with any thing but itself. God hath given us this deliverance. And, therefore, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the praise." For thou knowest, and we are all conscious to ourselves, that we did in nowise deserve it; but quite the contrary. God hath given it, and it ought to be so much the welcomer to us, for coming from such a hand. It is the Lord's doing, and therefore ought to be the more marvellous in our eyes. It is a deliverance full of mercy, and I had almost said, full of miracle. The finger of God was visibly in it; and there are plain signatures and characters upon it, of a more immediate divine interposition. And if we will not wisely consider the Lord's doing, we have reason to stand in awe of that threatening of his, "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up."

Psal. xxviii. 5.

It was a wonderful deliverance indeed, if we consider all the circumstances of it: the greatness of it; and the strangeness of the means whereby it was brought about; and the suddenness and easiness of it.

The greatness of it—it was a great deliverance, from the greatest fears, and from the greatest dangers; the apparent and imminent danger of the saddest thraldom and bondage, civil and spiritual, both of soul and body.

And it was brought about in a very extraordinary manner, and by very strange means: whether we consider the greatness and difficulty of the enterprise, or the closeness and secrecy of the design, which must of necessity be communicated at least to the chief of those who were to assist and engage in it: especially the States of the United Provinces, who were then in so much danger themselves, and wanted more than their own forces for their own defence and security: a kindness never to be forgotten by the English nation. And besides all this, the difficulties and disappointments which happened, after the design was open and manifest, from the uncertainties of wind and weather, and many other accidents impossible to be foreseen and prevented. And yet in conclusion a strange concurrence of all things on all sides, to bring the thing which the providence of God intended to a happy issue and effect.

And we must not here forget the many worthies of our nation, who did so generously run all hazards of life and fortune, for the preservation of our religion, and the asserting of our ancient laws and liberties.

These are all strange and unusual means; but, which is stranger yet, the very counsels and methods

of our enemies did prepare the way for all this, and perhaps more effectually, than any counsel and contrivance of our own could have done it. For even the Jesuits, those formal politicians by book and rule, without any consideration or true knowledge of the temper, and interest, and other circumstances of the people they were designing upon, and had to deal withal; and indeed without any care to know them: I say, the Jesuits, who, for so long a time, and for so little reason, have affected the reputation of the deepest and craftiest statesman in the world, have, upon this great occasion, and when their whole kingdom of darkness lay at stake, by a more than ordinary infatuation and blindness, so outwitted and overreached themselves in their own counsels, that they have really contributed as much, or more, to our deliverance from the destruction which they had designed to bring upon us, than all our wisest and best friends could have done.

And then if we consider further, how sudden and surprising it was, so that we could hardly believe it when it was accomplished: and, like the children of Israel, "when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." When all things were driving on furiously, and in great haste, then God gave an unexpected check to the designs of men, and stopped them in their full career. Who among us could have imagined, but a few months ago, so happy and so speedy an end of our fears and troubles? God hath at once scattered all our fears, and outdone all our hopes, by the greatness and suddenness of our deliverance. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

And, lastly, if we consider the cheapness and

easiness of this deliverance. All this was done, without a battle, and almost without blood. All the danger is, lest we should loathe it, and grow sick of it, because it was so very easy. Had it come upon harder terms, and had we waded to it through a red sea of blood, we would have valued it more. But this surely is great wantonness, and whatever we think of it, one of the highest provocations imaginable: for there can hardly be a fouler and blacker ingratitude towards Almighty God, than to slight so great a deliverance, only because it came to us so easily, and hath cost us so very cheap.

I will mention but one circumstance more, which may not be altogether unworthy our observation—That God seems in this last deliverance, in some sort, to have united and brought together all the great deliverances which he hath been pleased to work for this nation against all the remarkable attempts of popery, from the beginning of our Reformation. Our wonderful deliverance from the formidable Spanish invasion designed against us, happened in the year 1588. And now, just a hundred years after, God was pleased to bring about this last great and most happy deliverance. That horrid gunpowder conspiracy, without precedent, and without parallel, was designed to have been executed upon the Fifth day of November; the same day upon which his Highness the Prince of Orange landed the forces here in England, which he brought hither for our rescue. So that this is a day every way worthy to be solemnly set apart and joyfully celebrated by this church and nation, throughout all generations; as the fittest of all other to comprehend, and to put us in mind to commemorate, all the great deliverances which God hath wrought for us from popery, and

its inseparable companion, arbitrary power. And we may then say with the holy Psalmist, "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it."

Psal. cxviii. 23, 24.

Secondly, As the case in the text is much like our's, so let us take heed that the doom and sentence there be not so too. If, after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, and since God has punished us less than our iniquities did deserve; should we again break his commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, would he not be angry with us till he had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? What could we in reason expect after all this, but utter ruin and destruction? We may here apply, as St. Paul does, God's dealing with the people of Israel, to the times of the gospel: for he speaks of it as an example and admonition to all ages to the end of the world. Now these things, says the apostle, "Were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted: neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them, &c. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents." For the explication of this passage we must have recourse to the history, which gives this account of it: "And the people spake against God, and against Moses, wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness?" &c. impeaching God and his servant Moses, as if by this deliverance they had put them into a much worse condition than they were in when they were in Egypt. "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the

1 Cor. x., 6, 7. 9, 10, 11.

Numb. xxi. 5, 6.

people, and much people of Israel died." But how was this a tempting of Christ? "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted;" that is, let not us, now under the gospel, tempt our Saviour and deliverer, as the Israelites did their's, by slighting that great deliverance, and by speaking against God, and against Moses. "Neither murmer ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." And how far this may concern us, and all others, to the end of the world, who shall tempt Christ, the great patron and deliverer of his church, and murmur without cause, as the Israelites did, at the deliverances which he works for them, and against the instruments of it, the apostle tells us in the next words:—"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples (or types); and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." Let us not tempt Christ, who is now beginning the glorious deliverance of his church from the tyranny of Antichrist. Ver. 11.

To draw now towards a conclusion; I will comprehend my advice to you upon the whole matter, in as few words as I can.

Let us use this great deliverance which God hath given us ["such a deliverance as this"] from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us, not by using them as they would have done us, had we fallen under their power, with great insolence, and rage, and cruelty; but with great moderation and clemency, making as few examples of severity as will be consistent with our future security from the like attempts upon our religion and laws: and even in the execution of justice upon the greatest offenders, let us not give so much countenance to the ill

examples which have been set of extravagant fines and punishments, as to imitate those patterns which with so much reason we abhor; no, not in the punishment of the authors of them.

And let us endeavour, for once, to be so wise, as not to forfeit the fruits of this deliverance, and to hinder ourselves of the benefit and advantage of it, by breaches and divisions among ourselves. As we have no reason to desire it, so I think we can hardly ever hope to understand popery better, and the cruel designs of it, than we do already, both from the long trial and experience which we have had of it in this nation, and likewise from that dismal and horrid view which hath of late been given us of the true spirit and temper of it in one of our neighbour nations, which hath long pretended to the profession of the most refined and moderate popery in the world; but hath now at last shewed itself in its true colours, and in the perfection of a persecuting spirit; and have therein given us a most sad and deplorable instance, of a religion corrupted and degenerated into that, which, if it be possible, is worse than none,

And since, by the undeserved mercy of God to us, we have, upon such easy terms in comparison, escaped their rage and fury; let us now at length resolve, never to join in affinity with the people of these abominations; since our alliances with them by marriage have had so fatal an influence, both upon the public peace and tranquillity of the nation, and upon the welfare also of private families. I have known many instances of this kind, but hardly ever yet saw one that proved happy: but a great many that have been pernicious and ruinous to those protestant families, in which such unequal, and, as I think, unlawful matches have been made: not

that such marriages are void in themselves, but yet for all that sinful; because of the apparent danger and temptation to which those of our church and religion, that enter into them, do evidently expose themselves, of being seduced from their religion; not by the good arguments which the other can offer to that purpose, but by the ill arts which they have the confidence and the conscience to make use of in the making of proselytes.

And let us pay our most hearty and thankful acknowledgments, chiefly and in the first place, to Almighty God, the blessed author of this deliverance; and under him, to that happy instrument, whom God hath been pleased, in great pity to this sinful and unworthy nation, to raise up on purpose for it, his Highness the Prince of Orange; and to that end did, in his all-wise providence, lay the foundation of our then future deliverance, in that auspicious match which was concluded here in England, about eleven years ago, between this renowned prince and our excellent princess.

This is that most illustrious house of Nassau and Orange, which God hath so highly honoured above all the families of the earth, to give a check to the two great aspiring monarchies of the west, and bold attempters upon the liberties of Europe: to the one, in the last age; and to the other, in the present. As if the princes of this valiant and victorious line had been of the race of Hercules, born to rescue mankind from oppression, and to quell monsters.

And, lastly, Let us beseech Almighty God, all whose ways and works are perfect, that he would establish that which he hath wrought, and still carry it on to further and greater perfection: which, after such an earnest of his favour and good-

will to us, we have no reason to doubt but that he is ready to do for us; if by our own fickleness and inconstancy, disgusting the deliverance now it is come, which we so earnestly desired before it came; if by our ungrateful murmurings and discontents, by our own foolish heats and animosities, kindled and carried on by the ill designs of some, working upon the tenderness and scruples of others, under the specious pretences of conscience and loyalty: I say, if by some or all these ways, we do not refuse the blessings which God now offers, and defeat and frustrate the merciful design of this wonderful revolution, God will still "rejoice over us, to do us good," and "think thoughts of peace towards us, thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give us an expected end" of our long troubles and confusions.

But if we will not know, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, our destruction will then be of ourselves; and there will be no need that God should be angry with us, for we shall be undone by our own differences and quarrels about the way and means of our being saved; and so be angry with one another till we be consumed. Which God, of his infinite goodness, give us all the grace and wisdom to prevent; for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ, to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXIII.

OF FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES, AND AGAINST REVENGE.

[Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, March 8, 1688-9.]

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.—MATTH. v. 44.

THE gospel hath promised forgiveness of sins to us upon two conditions—that we sincerely repent of the sins which we have committed against God; and, that we heartily forgive to men the injuries and offences which they have been guilty of towards us.

I shall at this time, by God's assistance, treat of the latter of these, from the words which I have recited to you; which are part of our Saviour's excellent sermon upon the mount. In which he doth not only explain, but enlarge and perfect the moral and natural law, by adding to it precepts and prohibitions of greater perfection, than either the law of Moses, or the natural law, in their largest extent, did contain.

He forbids polygamy and divorce, except only in the case of adultery; and likewise revenge; none of which were either forbidden by the law of nature, or by the law which was given by Moses.

And to these prohibitions our blessed Saviour adds several new precepts of greater perfection than any laws that were extant before. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies." The Jewish law commanded them to love their neighbours, meaning

their brethren and those of their own nation: but our Saviour, by commanding us to love our enemies, hath in the most emphatical manner that can be, commanded us to love all men. For if any were to be excluded from our charity, none so likely to be so as our enemies. So that after a command to love our enemies, it was needless to name any others, because men are naturally apt to love those that love them.

"I say unto you, Love your enemies;" here the inward affection is required. "Bless them that curse you;" here outward civility and affability are required, in opposition to rude and uncivil language; for so blessing and cursing do in Scripture frequently signify. "Do good to them that hate you;" here real acts of kindness are commanded to be done by us to our bitterest and most malicious enemies. "Pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you;" these are the highest expressions of enmity that can be, calumny and cruelty; and yet we are commanded to pray for those that touch us in these two tenderest points of all other, our reputation and our life. And to secure the sincerity of our charity towards our enemies, we are required to express it by our hearty prayers to God for them: to God, I say, before whom it is both impious and dangerous to dissemble; and from whom we can expect no mercy for ourselves, if with feigned lips we beg it of him for others.

You see what is the duty here required; that we bear a sincere affection to our most malicious and implacable enemies, and be ready upon occasion to give real testimony of it.

And because this may seem a hard duty, and not so easy to be reconciled either to our inclination or our reason; I shall endeavour to shew, that this law

is not only reasonable, but much more perfect and excellent, and the practice of it more easy and delightful, and upon all accounts much more for our benefit and advantage, than the contrary. And that upon four considerations; which I shall endeavour to represent with their just advantage, and so as may, I hope, not only convince our judgments of the reasonableness of this precept, but likewise bend and sway our wills to the obedience and practice of it.

I. If we consider the nature of the act here required, which is to love; which, when it is not a mere passion, but under the government of our reason, is the most natural, and easy, and delightful, of all the affections which God hath planted in human nature: whereas ill-will, and hatred, and revenge, are very troublesome and vexatious passions. Both the devising of mischief, and the accomplishment of it, and the reflection upon it afterwards, are all uneasy; and the consequences of it many times pernicious to ourselves. The very design of revenge is troublesome, and puts the spirits into an unnatural fermentation and tumult. The man that meditates it is always restless, his very soul is stung, swells and boils, is in pain and anguish, hath no ease, no enjoyment of itself, so long as this passion reigns. The execution of it may perhaps be attended with some present pleasure; but that pleasure is unreasonable and brutish, momentary and short, like a flash of lightning, which vanisheth in the twinkling of an eye.

It is commonly said that revenge is sweet; but to a calm and considerate mind, patience and forgiveness are sweeter, and do afford a much more rational and solid and durable pleasure than revenge.

The monuments of our mercy and goodness are far a more pleasing and delighting spectacle, than of our rage and cruelty. And no sort of thought does usually haunt men with more terror, than the reflection upon what they have done in the way of revenge.

Besides that, the consequences of this passion do commonly prove very prejudicial to ourselves. For the revenge of one injury doth naturally draw on more, and will oblige us for the same reason to a new revenge of them; and this brings on a perpetual and endless circulation of injuries and revenges. So that whoever seeks revenge upon another, doth commonly in the issue take it upon himself; and whilst he thinks to transfer the injury which he hath received from him that did it, he doubles it upon himself.

Such and so great are the troubles and inconveniences of a malicious and revengeful temper; but "there is no torment in love," as St. John excellently says. To be kindly affectioned towards all, to bear no grudge or ill-will, no thought of displeasure or revenge towards any man, is the easiest posture, the most pleasant state of the mind. So that if not for their sakes, yet for our own, we should love our enemies, and do good to them that hate us; because to be thus affected towards all men, is as great a kindness to ourselves, as it is charity to others.

II. If we consider the qualification of the object; it is our enemy whom we are required to love. In whom, though there be something that is justly disgustful, yet there is something also that is lovely; and if we persist in our kindness to him, notwithstanding his enmity to us, the enmity may wear off,

and perhaps at length be changed into a sincere and firm friendship.

It is true indeed, that, with regard to ourselves, personal enmity towards us is one of the most inconvenient qualities that a man can have, but not therefore the worst in itself. If we could be impartial and lay aside prejudice, we might perhaps discern several very lovely qualities in him who hates us: and virtue is to be owned, and praised, and loved, even in an enemy. And perhaps his enmity towards us is not so great and inexcusable a fault, as we apprehend; he is not perhaps our enemy to that degree, nor so altogether without cause, as we imagine; possibly we have provoked him, or by his own mistake, or through the malicious representation of others he may be induced to think so: and are not we ourselves liable to the like misapprehensions concerning others, of which we are many times afterwards convinced and ashamed? and so may he, and then his enmity will cease, if we will but have a little patience with him, as we always wish in the like case that others would have with us.

At the worst, though never so sore and causeless an enemy, though never so bad a man, yet he is a man, and as such, hath something in him which the blindest passion cannot deny to be good and amiable. He hath the same nature with ourselves, which we cannot hate or despise, without hatred and contempt of ourselves. Let a man's faults be what they will, they do not destroy his nature, and make him cease to be a man.

The two great foundations of love are relation and likeness. "No one thing (says Tully) is so like, so equal to another, as one man is to another." What

difference soever there may be between us and another man, yea, though he be our enemy, yet he is still like us in the main; and perhaps but too like us in that for which we find so much fault with him—a proneness to offer affronts and injuries.

And there is an essential relation, as well as likeness, between one man and another, which nothing can ever dissolve, because it is founded in that which no man can divest himself of—in human nature. So far is it from being true, which Mr. Hobbes asserts as the fundamental principle of his politics, "That men are naturally in a state of war and enmity with one another;" that the contrary principle, laid down by a much deeper and wiser man, I mean Aristotle, is most certainly true, "That men are naturally akin and friends to each other." Some unhappy accidents and occasions may make men enemies, but naturally every man is a friend to another: and that is the surest and most unalterable reason of things which is founded in nature, not that which springs from mutable accidents and occasions. So that whoever is recommended to us under the notion of a man, ought not to be looked upon by us and treated as an enemy.

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Consider farther, that an enemy, even whilst he is exercising his enmity towards us, may do us many acts of real advantage; which, though they do not proceed from kindness, yet in truth are benefits. The malicious censures of our enemies, if we make a right use of them, may prove a greater advantage to us, than the civilities of our best friends. We can easily afford, nay the wisest of men can hardly forbear, to love a flatterer, to embrace him, and to take him into our bosom; and yet an open enemy is a thousand times better and less dangerous than he.

It is good for many men that they have had enemies, who have many times been to them the happy occasion of reforming those faults, which none but an enemy would have taken the freedom, I had almost said, would have had the friendship, to have told them of.

But what if, after all, this enemy of our's, this hated man, prove to be one of our best friends? for so reconciled enemies usually are. And if any thing will reconcile an enemy, love and kindness will. An obstinate goodness is apt to conquer even the worst of men. It is hardly in the nature of man to withstand the kindness of one, whom, by all that we could do, we have not been able to make our enemy. After a man hath done the greatest injury to another, not only to find no revenge following upon it, but the first opportunity taken to oblige him, is so very surprising, that it can hardly fail to gain upon the worst disposition, and to melt down the hardest temper. So that we should love our enemies, if not for what they are at present, yet for what they may be, and in hope that by these means they may in time become our friends.

III. If we consider the excellency and generosity of the thing itself. To love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us, is the perfection of goodness, and the advancement of it to its highest pitch. It is the most excellent and perfect act of the greatest and most perfect of all graces and virtues—I mean charity; which by St. Paul is called the "bond of perfection;" and by St. James, "the perfect and the royal law;" because it inspires men with a greatness of mind fit for kings and princes, in whom nothing is more admirable, than a generous goodness and clemency, even towards great enemies and of-

fenders, so far as is consistent with the public good. Love for love is but justice and gratitude; love for no love is favour and kindness; but love for hatred and enmity is a most Divine temper, a steady and immutable goodness that is not to be stirred by provocation, and so far from being conquered, that it is rather confirmed by its contrary: for if hatred and enmity do not extinguish love, what can? This is goodness indeed; not only without merit and obligation, without invitation or motive; but against all reasonable expectation, and in despite of all temptation and provocation to the contrary.

So that to return good for evil, and love for hatred, is one of the greatest arguments of a great mind, and of deep wisdom and consideration: for naturally our first inclinations and thoughts towards our enemies, are full of anger and revenge; but our second and wiser thoughts will tell us, that forgiveness is much more generous than revenge. And a more glorious victory cannot be gained over another man than this, that when the injury began on his part, the kindness should begin on our's. If both the ways were equally in our power, yet it is a much more desirable conquest to overcome evil with good, than with evil. By this, we can only conquer our enemy, and may perhaps fail in that; but by the other, we certainly conquer ourselves, and perhaps our enemy too; overcoming him in the noblest manner, and walking with him gently till he be cool, and without force effectually subduing him to be our friend. This, as one fitly compares it, is, like a great and wise general, by art and stratagem, by mere dint of skill and conduct, by patience and wise delay, without ever striking a stroke, or shedding one drop of blood, to vanquish an enemy, and to

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make an end of the war, without ever putting it to the hazard of a battle.

Revenge is blind and rash, and does always proceed from impotency and weakness of mind. It is anger that spurs men on to it; and anger is certainly one of the foolishest passions of human nature, and which commonly betrays men to the most imprudent and unreasonable things. So Solomon observes, "He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly:" and again, "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools:" but to be able to bear provocation, is an argument of great wisdom; and to forgive it, of a great mind. So the same wise man tells us, "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." It is a greater thing, in case of great provocation, to calm a man's own spirit, than to storm and take a strong city.

Prov. xiv. 29. Eccl. vii. 9. Prov. xvi. 32.

Whereas the angry man loseth and lets fall the government of himself, and lays the reins upon the neck of the wild beast, his own brutish appetite and passion; which hurries him on first to revenge, and then to repentance for the folly which he hath been guilty of in gratifying so unreasonable a passion. For it very seldom happens, that any man executes an act of revenge, but the very next moment after he hath done it, he is sorry for it, and wisheth he had not done it. Whereas patience and forgiveness do wisely prevent both the mischief to others, and the trouble to ourselves, which is usually consequent upon revenge.

IV. If we consider the perfection and prevalency of the examples which the gospel proposeth to us, to allure and engage us to the practice of this duty.

And they are the examples of God himself, and of the Son of God in the nature of man.

1. The example of God himself. The Scripture doth frequently set before us the goodness of God's common providence to sinners, for our pattern. And this is the argument whereby our blessed Saviour presseth the duty in the text upon us, in the verse immediately after it: (ver. 45.) "That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust." The same argument Seneca also urgeth to the same purpose. "How many (says he) are unworthy of the light, and yet the day visits them?" And speaking of the gods, "They bestow (says he) their benefits upon the unthankful, and are ready to help those who make a bad construction and use of their kindness." And almost in the very words of our Saviour, *Etiam ingratis sol oritur*, &c. "The sun riseth even upon the most vile and profligate persons, and the seas are open to pirates."

Thus is God affected towards those who are guilty of the greatest provocations towards him. He bestows upon them the gifts of his common providence; and not only so, but is ready to forgive innumerable offences to them for Christ's sake. This pattern the apostle proposeth to our imitation: "Be ye kind, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you:" "Be ye therefore imitators of God as dear children." This temper and disposition of mind, is the prime excellency and perfection of the divine nature; and who would not be ambitious to be like the most perfect and best of beings? and so our blessed Saviour

Eph. iv. 32.
Chap. v. 1.

concludes this argument, in the last verse of this chapter, " Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" which St. Luke renders, " Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful." So that in that very thing which we think to be so hard and difficult, you see that we have perfection itself for our pattern. And this example ought to be of so much greater force with us, by how much greater reason there is, why we should do thus to one another, than why God should do thus to us. Our offences against God are more and greater, than any man ever was or could be guilty of towards us: besides that, there are many considerations which ought to tie up our hands, and may reasonably restrain us from falling furiously upon one another, which can have no place at all in God. We may justly fear, that the consequence of our revenge may return upon ourselves, and that it may come to be our own case to stand in need of mercy and forgiveness from others; and therefore, out of necessary caution and prudence, we should take heed not to set any bad example in this kind, lest it should recoil upon ourselves. We who stand so much in need of forgiveness ourselves, ought in all reason to be very easy to forgive others. But now the divine nature is infinitely above any real injury or suffering. God can never stand in need of pity or forgiveness; and yet of his own mere goodness, without any interest or design, how slow is he to anger, and how ready to forgive?

And, which comes yet nearer to us, there is also the example of the Son of God, our blessed Saviour; who, in our nature, and in case of the greatest injuries and provocations imaginable, did practise this virtue to the height: and all this for our sakes, as

well as for our example. So that he requires nothing of us but what he himself submitted to with the greatest patience and constancy of mind, in our stead and wholly for our advantage.

He rendered good for evil to all mankind, and shewed greater love to us whilst we were enemies to him, than ever any man did to his friend.

He prayed for those that despitefully used him and persecuted him. And this, not upon cool consideration, after the injury was done, and the pains of his sufferings were over; but whilst the sense and smart of them was upon him, and in the very agony and bitterness of death: in the height of all his anguish, he poured out his soul an offering for the sins of men, and his blood a sacrifice to God for the expiation of a guilt of that very sin whereby they shed it; pleading with God, in the behalf of his murderers, the only excuse that was possible to be made for their malice, that is, their ignorance; and spending his last breath in that most charitable prayer for them, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The last declaration which he made of his mind, was love to his enemies; and the last legacy he bequeathed, was an earnest request to God for the forgiveness of his persecutors and murderers.

So that if any example ought to be dear to us, and effectually to engage us to the imitation of it, this of our blessed Saviour should; since the injuries which he suffered have saved us from suffering, and the greatest blessing and happiness that ever befel mankind is due to this excellent example. And then with what confidence, nay with what conscience, can we pretend to share in the benefits of this example, without imitating the virtues of it?

Can we seriously contemplate the excessive kindness and charity of the Son of God to the sinful sons of men, after all our bitterest enmity towards him, and most cruel and injurious usage of him; and all his charity exercised towards us, whilst he was under the actual sense and suffering of these things; and yet not be provoked by an example so admirable in itself, and of such mighty advantage to us, "to go and do likewise?"

But notwithstanding the power of these arguments to persuade to this duty, I must not dissemble some objections, which are, I believe, in many of your minds against it; and to which, for the full clearing of this matter, it will be fit to give some satisfaction. And they are these:

1. That this precept in the text does not seem so well to agree with another of our blessed Saviour's in another evangelist, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Here our blessed Saviour seems not to require forgiveness, unless he that hath done the injury declare his repentance for it; but the text plainly requires us to forgive those who are so far from repenting of their enmity, that they still pursue it, and exercise it upon us. Thus our Lord teaches us, and thus he himself practised towards his persecutors. Luke xvii. 3, 4.

But this appearance of contradiction will quickly vanish, if we consider that forgiveness is sometimes taken chiefly for abstaining from revenge; and so far we are to forgive our enemies, even whilst they continue so, and though they do not repent: and

not only so, but we are also to pray for them, and to do good offices for them, especially of common humanity: and this is the meaning of the precept in the text. But sometimes forgiveness does signify a perfect reconciliation to those that have offended us, so as to take them again into our friendship; which they are by no means fit for, till they have repented of their enmity, and laid it aside. And this is plainly the meaning of the other text.

2. It is further objected, That this seems to be a very imprudent thing, and of dangerous consequence to ourselves; because by bearing one injury so patiently, and forgiving it so easily, we invite more; and not only tempt our enemy to go on, but others also by his example to do the like; which will make ill-natured men to provoke us on purpose, with a crafty design to wrest benefits from us: for what better trade can a man drive, than to gain benefits in exchange for injuries?

To this I answer three things:

First, It is to be feared that there are but few so very good, as to make this kind return for injuries: perhaps, of those that call themselves Christians, not one in a hundred. And he is not a cunning man that will venture to make an enemy, when there is the odds of a hundred to one against him, that this enemy of his will take the first opportunity to take his revenge upon him.

Secondly, It is also on the other hand to be hoped, that but very few are so prodigiously bad, as to make so barbarous a return for the unexpected kindness of a generous enemy. And this is encouragement enough to the practice of this duty, if there be a probable hope that it will have a good effect; and however, if it should fall out otherwise,

yet this would not be reason enough to discourage our goodness, especially since the kindness which we do to our friends is liable almost to an equal objection, that they may prove ungrateful, and become our enemies, it having been often seen that great benefits, and such as are beyond requital, instead of making a man more a friend, have made him an enemy.

Thirdly, Our Saviour never intended by this precept, that our goodness should be blind and void of all prudence and discretion, but that it should be so managed as to make our enemy sensible both of his own fault, and of our favour; and so as to give him as little encouragement, as there is reason for it, to hope to find the like favour again upon the like provocation. Our Saviour commands us to do the thing, but hath left it to our prudence to do it in such a manner as may be most effectual, both to reclaim the offender, and likewise to secure ourselves against future and further injuries.

3. Lastly, It is objected, what can we do more to our best friends, than to love them and bless them, than to do good to them and pray for them? And are we then to make no difference between our enemies and our friends?

Yes, surely; and so we may, notwithstanding this precept: for there are degrees of love, and there are benefits of several rates and sizes. Those of the first rate we may with reason bestow upon our friends; and with those of a second or third rate, there is all the reason in the world why our enemies should be very well contented.

Besides that, we may abstain from revenge, yea, and love our enemy, and wish him and do him good; and yet it will not presently be necessary

that we should take him into our bosom, and treat and trust him as our intimate and familiar friend: for every one that is not our enemy, is not fit to be our friend; much less one that hath been our enemy, and perhaps is so still. There must be a great change in him that hath been our enemy, and we must have had long experience of him before it be fit, if ever it be so, to take him into our friendship.

All that now remains, is to make some inferences from the discourse which I have made upon this argument, by way of application. And they shall be these four:

I. If we think it so very difficult to demean ourselves towards our enemies, as the Christian religion doth plainly require us to do; to forgive them, and love them, and pray for them, and to do good offices to them, then certainly it concerns us in prudence to be very careful how we make enemies to ourselves. One of the first principles of human wisdom, in the conduct of our lives, I have ever thought to be this—to have a few intimate friends, and to make no enemies, if it be possible, to ourselves. St. Paul lays a great stress upon this, and presseth it very earnestly. For after he had forbidden revenge, "Recompense to no man evil for evil:" as if he were very sensible how hard a matter it is to bring men to this, he adviseth in the next words to prevent, if it be possible, the occasions of revenge. "If it be possible, and as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men:" that is, if we can avoid it, have no enmity with any man. And that for two weighty reasons:

Rom. xii. 17.

Ver. 18.

The first I have already intimated; because it is so very hard to behave ourselves towards enemies

as we ought. This we shall find to be a difficult duty to flesh and blood; and it will require great wisdom and consideration, and humility of mind, for a man to bring down his spirit to the obedience of this command: for the fewer enemies we have, the less occasion will there be of contesting this hard point with ourselves.

And the other reason is, I think, yet plainer and more convincing—because enemies will come of themselves; and let a man do what he can, he shall have some. Friendship is a thing that needs to be cultivated, if we would have it come to any thing; but enemies, like ill weeds, will spring up of themselves without our care and toil. The enemy, as our Saviour calls the devil, will sow these tares in the night; and when we least discern it, will scatter the seeds of discord and enmity among men; and will take an advantage either from the envy, or malice, or the mistakes of men, to make them enemies to one another. Which would make one wonder to see what care and pains some men will take, to provoke mankind against them; how they will lay about them, and snatch at opportunities to make themselves enemies, as if they were afraid to let the happy occasion slip by them: but all this care and fear surely is needless; we may safely trust an ill-natured world, that we shall have enemies enough, without our doing things on our part to provoke and procure them.

But above all, it concerns every man in prudence to take great care not to make personal enemies to himself; for these are the sorest and the surest of all other, and when there is an opportunity for it, will sit hardest upon us. Injuries done to the public are certainly the greatest, and yet they are many times more easily forgiven, than those which are

done to particular persons. For when revenge is every body's work, it may prove nobody's. The general wrongs which are done to human society, do not so sensibly touch and sting men, as personal injuries and provocations. The law is never angry or in a passion, and it is not only a great indecency, but a fault, when the judges of it are so. Heat of prosecution belongs to particular persons; and it is their memory of injuries, and desire to revenge them, and diligence to set on and sharpen the law, that is chiefly to be dreaded: and if the truth were known, it is much to be feared, that there are almost as few private as public acts of oblivion passed in the world; and they commonly pass as slowly, and with as much difficulty, and not till the grace and good effect of them is almost quite lost.

II. If we ought to be thus affected towards our enemies, how great ought our kindness, and the expressions of it, to be to others? to those who never disobliged us, nor did us any injury by word or deed; to those more especially, who stand in a nearer relation to us; to our natural kindred, and to our spiritual brethren to whom we are so strongly linked and united by the common bond of Christianity; and, lastly, to our benefactors, and those who have been beforehand with us in obligation: for all these are so many special ties and endearments of men to one another, founded either in nature or religion, or in common justice and gratitude. And therefore between all these and our enemies, we ought to make a very wide and sensible difference, in our carriage and kindness towards them. And if we do not so, we represent our Saviour as an unreasonable lawgiver, and do perversely interpret this precept of his contrary to the reasonable and equita-

ble meaning of it. For whatever degree of kindness is here required towards our enemies, it is certain that so much more is due to others, as according to the true proportion of our tie and obligation to them they have deserved at our hands; nothing being more certain, than that our blessed Saviour, the founder of our religion, did never intend by any precept of it to cancel any real obligation of nature, or justice, or gratitude; or to offer violence in the least to the common reason of mankind.

III. Hence we learn the excellency and the reasonableness of the Christian religion, which hath carried our duty so high in things which do so directly tend to the perfection of human nature, and to the peace of human society, and which, if all things be rightly considered, are most agreeable to the clearest and best reason of mankind: so that those things which were heretofore looked upon, and that only by some few of the wiser sort, as heroical instances of goodness, and above the common rate of humanity, are now by the Christian religion made the indispensable duties of all mankind. And the precepts of no other religion, that ever yet appeared in the world, have advanced human nature so much above itself, and are so well calculated for the peace and happiness of the world, as the precepts of the Christian religion are: for they strictly forbid the doing of injuries by way of prevention; and in case they happen, they endeavour to put a present stop to the progress of them, by so severely forbidding the revenging of them.

And yet, after all this, it must be acknowledged to be a very untoward objection against the excellency and efficacy of the Christian religion, that the practice of so many Christians is so unequal to the

perfection of these precepts. For who is there, in the changes and revolutions of human affairs, and when the wheel of Providence turns them uppermost, and lays their enemies at their feet, that will give them any quarter? Nay, that does not greedily seize upon the first opportunities of revenge, and, like an eagle hungry for his prey, make a sudden stoop upon them with all his force and violence; and when he hath them in his pounces, and at his mercy, is not ready to tear them in pieces?

So that after all our boasts of the excellency of our religion, where is the practice of it? This, I confess, is a terrible objection indeed; and I must entreat of you, my brethren, to help me to the best answer to it: not by any nice distinctions and speculations about it, but by the careful and honest practice of this precept of our religion.

This was the old objection against philosophy: That many that were philosophers in their opinions were faulty in their lives: but yet this was never thought by wise men to be a good objection against philosophy. And unless we will lay more weight upon the objections against religion, and press them harder than we think it reasonable to do in any other case, we must acknowledge likewise, that this objection against religion is of no force. Men do not cast off the art of physic, because many physicians do not live up to their own rules, and do not themselves follow those prescriptions which they think fit to give to others; and there is a plain reason for it, because their swerving from their own rules doth not necessarily signify that their rules are not good, but only that their appetites are unruly, and too hard and headstrong for their reason: nothing being more certain than this—that rules may be very

reasonable, and yet they that give them may not follow them.

IV. The fourth and last inference from this whole discourse shall be this—that being convinced by what hath been said upon this argument, of the reasonableness of this duty, we would resolve upon the practice of it, whenever there is occasion offered for it in the course of our lives. I need not to put you in mind, that there is now like to be great occasions for it: I shall only say, that whenever there is so, nothing can be tied more strictly upon us than this duty is.

It hath often been a great comfort and confirmation to me, to see the humanity of the protestant religion so plainly discovering itself, upon so many occasions, in the practice of the professors of it. And setting aside all other advantages which our religion hath been evidently shewn to have above popery in point of reason and argument, I cannot for my life but think, that to be the best religion, which makes the best men, and from the nature of its principles is apt to make them so; most kind, and merciful, and charitable; and most free from malice, and revenge, and cruelty.

And therefore our blessed Saviour, who knew what was in man better than any man that ever was, knowing our great reluctance and backwardness to the practice of this duty, hath urged it upon us by such forcible and almost violent arguments, that if we have any tenderness for ourselves, we cannot refuse obedience to it. For he plainly tells us, that no sacrifice that we can offer will appease God towards us, so long as we ourselves are implacable to men, (verse 23 of this chapter:) "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy bro-

ther hath aught against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first go and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." To recommend this duty effectually to us, he gives it a preference to all the positive duties of religion: "First go and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Till this duty be discharged, God will accept of no service, no sacrifice at our hands. And therefore our liturgy doth with great reason declare it to be a necessary qualification for our worthy receiving of the sacrament, that we be in love and charity with our neighbours; because this is a moral duty, and of eternal obligation, without which no positive part of religion, such as the sacraments are, can be acceptable to God; especially since, in this blessed sacrament of Christ's body and blood, we expect to have the forgiveness of our sins ratified and confirmed to us: which, how can we hope for from God, if we ourselves be not ready to forgive one another?

"He shall have judgment without mercy (says St. James,) who hath shewed no mercy." And in that excellent form of prayer which our Lord himself hath given us, he hath taught us so to ask forgiveness of God, as not to expect it from him, if we do not forgive one another. So if we do not practise this duty, as hard as we think it is, every time that we put up this petition to God, ["Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us;"] we send up a terrible imprecation against ourselves, and do in effect beg of God not to forgive us. And therefore, to imprint this matter the deeper upon our minds, our blessed Saviour immediately after the recital of this prayer, hath thought fit to add a very remarkable enforcement of this petition, above all the rest;

"For if (says he,) ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matth. vi. 14, 15.

And our Saviour hath likewise in his gospel represented to us, both the reasonableness of this duty, and the danger of doing contrary to it, in a very lively and affecting parable, delivered by him to this purpose: concerning a wicked servant, who, when his Lord had but just beforeforgiven him a vast debt of ten thousand talents, took his poor fellow-servant by the throat, and, notwithstanding his humble submission and earnest entreaties to be favourable to him, haled him to prison for a trifling debt of a hundred pence. And the application which he makes of this parable, at the end of it, is very terrible, and such as ought never to go out of our minds: "So likewise (says he,) shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye do not from your hearts forgive every one his brother his trespasses." Matth. xviii. 23. Ver. 35. One might be apt to think at first view, that this parable was overdone, and wanted something of a due decorum; it being hardly credible, that a man, after he had been so mercifully and generously dealt withal, as upon his humble request to have so huge a debt so freely forgiven, should, whilst the memory of so much mercy was fresh upon him, even the very next moment, handle his fellow-servant, who had made the same humble submission and request to him which he had done to his lord, with so much roughness and cruelty, for so inconsiderable a sum. This, I say, would hardly seem credible, did we not see in experience how very unreasonable and

unmerciful some men are, and with what confidence they can ask and expect great mercy from God, when they will shew none to men.

The greatness of the injuries which are done to us, is the reason commonly pleaded by us why we cannot forgive them. But whoever thou art, that makest this an argument why thou canst not forgive thy brother, lay thine hand upon thine heart, and bethink thyself, how many more and much greater offences thou hast been guilty of against God: look up to that just and powerful Being that is above, and consider well, whether thou dost not both expect and stand in need of more mercy and favour from him, than thou canst find in thine heart to shew to thine offending brother?

We have all certainly great reason to expect, that, as we use one another, God will likewise deal with us. And yet, after all this, how little is this duty practised among Christians? and how hardly are the best of us brought to love our enemies, and to forgive them? and this, notwithstanding that all our hopes of mercy and forgiveness from God do depend upon it. How strangely inconsistent is our practice and our hope; and what a wide distance is there between our expectations from God, and our dealings with men? how very partial and unequal are we, to hope so easily to be forgiven, and yet be so hard to forgive?

Would we have God, for Christ's sake, to forgive us those numberless and monstrous provocations which we have been guilty of against his Divine Majesty; and shall we not, for his sake, for whose sake we ourselves are forgiven, be willing to forgive one another?

We think it hard to be obliged to forgive great in-

juries, and often repeated; and yet, woe be to us all, and most miserable shall we be to all eternity, if God do not all this to us, which we think to be so very hard and unreasonable for us to do to one another.

I have sometimes wondered how it should come to pass, that so many persons should be so apt to despair of the mercy and forgiveness of God to them; especially considering what clear and express declarations God hath made of his readiness to forgive our greatest sins and provocations upon our sincere repentance: but the wonder will be very much abated, when we shall consider with how much difficulty men are brought to remit great injuries, and how hardly we are persuaded to refrain from flying upon those who have given us any considerable provocation. So that when men look into themselves, and shall carefully observe the motions of their own minds towards those against whom they have been justly exasperated, they will see but too much reason to think that forgiveness is no such easy matter.

But our comfort in this case is, that God is not as man; "That his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts."

And the best way to keep ourselves from despairing of God's mercy and forgiveness to us, is to be easy to grant forgiveness to others: and without this as God hath reason to deny forgiveness to us, so we ourselves have all the reason in the world utterly to despair of it.

It would almost transport a Christian to read that admirable passage of the great heathen emperor and philosopher, M. Aurelius Antoninus:

M. Aur. Anton. l. 7. "Can the Gods (says he,) that are immortal, for the continuance of so many ages, bear without impatience with such and so many sinners as have ever been; and not only so, but likewise take care of them, and provide for them, that they want nothing: and dost thou so grievously take on, as one that can bear with them no longer? Thou, that art but for a moment of time; yea, thou that art one of those sinners thyself?"

I will conclude this whole discourse with those weighty and pungent sayings of the wise son of Sirach: "He that revengeth shall find vengeance from the Lord, and he will certainly retain his sins. Forgive thy neighbour that hath hurt thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. One man beareth hatred against another, and doth he seek pardon of the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a man like himself, and doth he ask forgiveness of his own sins?"

Eccl. xxviii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

Enable us, O Lord, by thy grace, to practise this excellent and difficult duty of our religion: and then, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," for thy mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, adoration and obedience, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CARE OF OUR SOULS, THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

[Preached before the King and Queen at Hampton-Court, April the 14th, 1689.]

But one thing is needful.—LUKE x. 42.

IN the accounts of wise men, one of the first rules and measures of human actions is this, to regard every thing more or less, according to the degree of its consequence and importance to our happiness. That which is most necessary to that end, ought in all reason to be minded by us in the first place, and other things only so far as they are consistent with that great end, and subservient to it.

Our blessed Saviour here tells us, that there is one thing needful, that is, one thing which ought first and principally to be regarded by us: and what that is, it is of great concernment to us all to know, that we may mind and pursue it as it deserves.

And we may easily understand what it is, by considering the context, and the occasion of these words, which was briefly this: our Saviour, as he went about preaching the kingdom of God, came into a certain village, where he was entertained at the house of two devout sisters. The elder, who had the care and management of the family and the affairs of it, was employed in making entertainment for such a guest: the other sat at our Saviour's feet,

attending to the doctrine of salvation which he preached.

The elder, finding herself not able to do all the business alone, desires of our Saviour that he would command her sister to come and help her. Upon this our Saviour gives her this gentle reprehension, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful." And what that is, he declares in the next words, "And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her;" that is, she hath chosen to take care of her salvation, which is infinitely more considerable than any thing else.

Our Saviour doth not altogether blame Martha for her respectful care of him, but commends her sister for her greater care of her soul; which made her either wholly to forget, or unwilling to mind, other things at that time. So that, upon the whole matter, he highly approves her wise choice, in preferring an attentive regard to his doctrine, even before that which might be thought a necessary civility to his person.

From the words thus explained, the observation which I shall make is this:

That the care of religion and of our souls is the one thing necessary, and that which every man is concerned in the first place and above all other things to mind and regard.

This observation seems to be plainly contained in the text. I shall handle it as briefly as I can; and then by way of application shall endeavour to persuade you and myself to mind this one thing necessary.

And in speaking to this serious and weighty argument, I shall do these two things:

First, I shall endeavour to shew wherein this care of religion and of our soul doth consist.

Secondly, to convince men of the necessity of taking this care.

I. I shall shew wherein this care of religion and our souls doth consist. And this I shall endeavour to do with all the plainness I can, and so as every one that hears me may understand, and be sufficiently directed what is necessary for him to do in order to his eternal salvation.

And of this I shall give an account in the five following particulars, in which I think the main business of religion and the due care of our souls does consist.

First, In the distinct knowledge, and in the firm belief and persuasion of those things which are necessary to be known and believed by us in order to our eternal salvation.

Secondly, In the frequent examination of our lives and actions, and in a sincere repentance for all the errors and miscarriages of them.

Thirdly, In the constant and daily exercise of piety and devotion.

Fourthly, In avoiding those things which are pernicious to our salvation, and whereby men do often hazard their souls.

Fifthly, In the even and constant practice of the several graces and virtues of a good life.

1. The due care of religion and our souls doth consist in the distinct knowledge, and in the firm belief and persuasion of those things which are necessary to be known and believed by us in order to our eternal salvation.

For this knowledge of the necessary principles and duties of religion is the foundation of all good

practice, wherein the life of religion doth consist. And without this no man can be truly religious. "Without faith (saith the apostle to the Hebrews,) it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Now these two expressions, of pleasing God and seeking him, are plainly of the same importance, and do both of them signify religion, or the worship and service of God; which doth antecedently suppose our firm belief and persuasion of these two fundamental principles of all religion, that there is a God, and, that he will reward those that serve him: because, unless a man do first believe these, there would neither be ground nor encouragement for any such thing as religion.

Heb. xi. 6.

And this knowledge of the necessary principles of religion our blessed Saviour calls eternal life, because it is so fundamentally necessary in order to our attaining of it: "This is life eternal (says he,) to know thee the only true God; and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ;" that is, to be rightly instructed in the knowledge of the only true God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Under which two general heads are comprehended all the necessary principles both of the natural and of the Christian religion.

Joh. xvii. 3.

And to the attaining of this knowledge which is absolutely necessary to salvation, no such extraordinary pains and study is required, but only a teachable disposition and a due application of mind. For whatever in religion is necessary to be known by all, must in all reason be plain and easy, and lie level to all capacities; otherwise we must say, that God, who would have all men to be saved, hath not pro-

vided for the salvation of all men. And therefore, now that the knowledge of the true God and the light of Christianity are spread abroad in the world, all that enjoy the gospel are, or may be, sufficiently instructed in all things necessary to their happiness: unless such care be used, as is in the church of Rome, "to take away the key of knowledge," and to lock up the Scriptures from the people in an unknown tongue; and this, as they pretend, upon a very charitable consideration; only it is to be hoped that it is not true, that the generality of mankind are mad, and have need to be kept in the dark. But, supposing men to be allowed those means of knowledge which God affords, and hath appointed for us, the great difficulty doth not commonly lie in men's understandings, but in their wills: only when men know these things, they must attend to them, and consider them; that the light which is in their understandings may warm their hearts, and have its due influence upon their lives.

2. The due care of our souls consists in the frequent examination of our lives and actions, and in a sincere repentance for all the errors and miscarriages of them: in a more particular and deep humiliation and repentance for deliberate and wilful sins, so far as we can call them to our remembrance; and in a general repentance for sins of ignorance, and infirmity, and surprise. In the exercise whereof, we are always to remember, that the nature of true repentance does not consist only in a humble confession of our sins to God, and a hearty trouble and contrition for them; but chiefly in the steadfast purpose and resolution of a better life, and, in prosecution of this resolution, in actual reformation and amendment.

By the constant exercise hereof, we are put into a safe condition; provided that we persevere in this holy resolution and course: but if we still retain the love and practice of any known sin, or if after we have taken up these good resolutions, we return again to an evil course; this is a clear evidence, either that our repentance was not sincere at first, or that we are relapsed into our former state: and then our souls are still in apparent danger of being lost, and will continue in that dangerous state, till we have renewed our repentance, and made it good in the following course of our lives.

3. The due care of our souls consists in the constant and daily exercise of piety and devotion, both in private and in public, if there be opportunity for it, especially at proper times, and upon more solemn occasions: by fervent prayer to God, and by hearing and reading the word of God with reverence and godly fear: by frequenting his public worship, and demeaning ourselves in it, with that solemnity and seriousness which becomes the presence and service of the great and glorious majesty of God, who observes our behaviour, and sees into our hearts: and by receiving the blessed sacrament, as often as we have opportunity, with due preparation and devotion of mind.

For these are not only outward testimonies of our inward piety, but they are means likewise appointed by God to improve and confirm us in holiness and goodness. And whoever neglects these duties of religion, or performs them in a slight and superficial manner, doth plainly shew that he hath neither a due sense of God, nor care of himself: for in vain does any man pretend that he does in good earnest design the end, when he neglects the best and most proper means for the attainment of it.

4. The due care of our souls consists also in avoiding those things which are pernicious to our salvation, and whereby men do often hazard their souls. Such in general is the practice of any known sin. By this we do, as it were, run upon the sword's point, and do endanger our salvation as much as a deep wound in our body would do our life: and though such a wound may perhaps be cured afterwards by repentance, yet no man, that commits any wilful sin, knows the dismal consequences of it, and whither by degress it may carry him at last: for upon such a provocation God may leave the sinner to himself, and withdraw his grace from him, and give him up to a hard and impenitent heart, to proceed from evil to worse, and from one wickedness to another, till he be finally ruined. So dangerous a thing is it knowingly to offend God, and to commit any deliberate act of sin.

More particularly, an inordinate love of the world is very pernicious to the souls of men; because it quencheth the heavenly life, and fills our minds with earthly cares and designs; it tempts men to forsake God and religion, when their worldly interests come in competition with them; and betrays them to fraud, and falsehood, and all kinds of injustice, and "many other hurtful lusts which drown the soul in perdition."

But besides these dangers which are more visible and apparent, there is another which is less discernible, because it hath the face of piety—and that is, faction in religion: by which I mean, an unpeaceable and uncharitable zeal about things wherein religion either doth not at all, or but very little consist. For besides that this temper is utterly inconsistent with several of the most eminent Christian graces and virtues, as humility, love, peace,

meekness, and forbearance towards those that differ from us; it hath likewise two very great mischiefs commonly attending upon it, and both of them pernicious to religion and the souls of men.

First, That it takes such men off from minding the more necessary and essential parts of religion. They are so zealous about small things, the tithing of mint, and anise, and cummin, that they neglect the weightier things of the law, faith, and mercy, and judgment, and the love of God: they spend so much of their time and heat about things doubtful, that they have no leisure to mind the things that are necessary: and are so concerned about little speculative opinions in religion, which they always call fundamental articles of faith, that the practice of religion is almost wholly neglected by them: and they are so taken up in spying out and censuring error and heresy in others, that they never think of curing those lusts, and vices, and passions which do so visibly reign in themselves. Deluded people! that do not consider that the greatest heresy in the world is a wicked life, because it is so directly and fundamentally opposite to the whole design of the Christian faith and religion; and that do not consider, that God will sooner forgive a man a hundred defects of his understanding, than one fault of his will.

Secondly, Another great mischief which attends this temper is, that men are very apt to interpret this zeal of their's against others, to be great piety in themselves, and as much as is necessary to bring them to heaven; and to think that they are very religious, because they keep a great stir about maintaining the outworks of religion, when it is ready to be starved within; and that there needs no more to denominate them good Christians, but to be of such a

party, and to be listed of such a church, which they always take for granted to be the only true one; and then zealously to hate, and uncharitably to censure all the rest of mankind.

How many are there in the world, that think they have made very sure of heaven, not by the old plain way of leaving their sins, and reforming their lives, but by a more close and cunning way of carrying their vices along with them into another church, and calling themselves good catholics, and all others heretics? and that having done this, they are in a safe condition; as if a mere name would admit a man into heaven, or as if there were any church in the world that had this fantastical privilege belonging to it, that a wicked man might be saved for no other reason but because he is of it.

Therefore, as thou valuest thy soul, take heed of engaging in any faction in religion; because it is a hundred to one but thy zeal will be so employed about lesser things, that the main and substantial parts of religion will be neglected: besides that, a man deeply engaged in heats and controversies of this nature, shall very hardly escape being possessed with that spirit of uncharitableness and contention, of peevishness and fierceness, which reigns in all factions, but more especially in those of religion.

5. The due care of our souls consists in the even and constant practice of the several graces and virtues of a good life; or, as the apostle expresseth it, in "exercising ourselves always to have a conscience void of offence towards God and men." For herein is religion best seen, in an equal and uniform practice of every part of our duty: not only in serving God devoutly, but in demeaning ourselves peaceably and justly, kindly and charitably towards all men:

not only in restraining ourselves from the outward act of sin, but in mortifying the inward inclination to it, in subduing our lusts, and governing our passions, and bridling our tongues. As he that would have a prudent care of his health and life, must not only guard himself against the chief and common diseases which are incident to men, and take care to prevent them; but must likewise be careful to preserve himself from those which are esteemed less dangerous, but yet sometimes do prove mortal: he must not only endeavour to secure his head and heart from being wounded, but must have a tender care of every part; there being hardly any disease or wound so slight, but that some have died of it. In like manner, the care of our souls consists in an universal regard to our duty, and that we be defective in no part of it: though we ought to have a more especial regard to those duties which are more considerable, and wherein religion doth mainly consist; as piety towards God, temperance and chastity in regard of ourselves, charity towards the poor, truth and justice, goodness and kindness towards all men: but then no other grace and virtue, though of an inferior rank, ought to be neglected by us.

And thus I have endeavoured, as plainly and briefly as I could, to declare to you in what instances the due care of religion and our souls doth chiefly consist.

And I would not have any man think that all this is an easy business, and requires but little time to do it in, and that a small degree of diligence and industry will serve for this purpose—To master and root out the inveterate habits of sin, to bring our passions under the command and government of our reason, and to attain to a good degree of every

Christian grace and virtue: that faith and hope and charity, humility and meekness and patience may all "have their perfect work;" and that, as St. James says, we "may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing;" nothing that belongs to the perfection of a good man, and of a good Christian. And this, whenever we come to make the trial, we shall find to be a great and a long work.

Some, indeed, would make religion to be a very short and easy business, and to consist only in believing what Christ hath done for us, and relying confidently upon it; which is so far from being the true notion of Christian faith, that, if I be not much mistaken, it is the very definition of presumption. For the Bible plainly teaches us, that unless our faith work by charity, and purify our hearts, and reform our lives; unless, like Abraham's faith, it be perfected by works, it is but a dead faith, and will in nowise avail to our justification and salvation. And our blessed Saviour, the great Author and finisher of our faith, hath nowhere, that I know of, said one word to this purpose, That faith, separated from obedience and a good life, will save any man: but he hath said very much to the contrary, and that very plainly. For he promiseth blessedness to none, but those who live in the practice of those Christian graces and virtues which are particularly mentioned by him, in the beginning of his excellent sermon upon the mount; of humility, and repentance, and meekness, and righteousness, and mercifulness, and purity, and peaceableness and patience under persecution and sufferings for righteousness' sake. And afterwards, in the same sermon, "Not every one (saith he) that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter

Mat. v. 3, 4, &c.

Matth. vii. 21.

into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And again,

Ver. 24. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock."

Ver. 26, 27. And afterwards he tells us, that whosoever builds his hopes of eternal happiness upon any other foundation, than that faith of the gospel, and the practice of its precepts, doth "build his house upon the sand;" which, when it comes to be tried by the rain and the winds, will fall; and the fall of it will be great. And elsewhere, "If ye

John xiii. 17. know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." And he does very severely check the vain confidence and presumption of those, who will needs rely upon him for salvation without

Luke vi. 46. keeping his commandments; "Why call ye me, (says he) Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Does any man think that he can be saved without

1 Joh. v. 3. loving God and Christ? "And this (saith St. John) is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." And again, "He that

1 Joh. ii. 4. saith I know him," and, by the same reason, "he that saith I love him, and keepeth not his commandments, he is a liar, and

John xiv. 15. the truth is not in him." "If ye love me, (saith our blessed Lord,) keep my commandments." And again, "He that hath my

Ver. 21. commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

Does any man think, that any but the children of God shall be heirs of eternal life? hear then what St.

Joh. iii. 7. John saith, "Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness

is righteous, even as he is righteous." And again, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil, he that doeth not righteousness is not of God." Ver. 10.

In a word, this is the perpetual tenor of the Bible, from the beginning of it to the end. "If thou doest well, (saith God to Cain,) shalt thou not be accepted?" And again, "Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." And in the gospel, when the young man came to our Saviour, to be instructed by him, what good thing he should do that he might inherit eternal life, our Lord gives him this short and plain advice: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." And in the very last chapter of the Bible, we find this solemn declaration, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city," that is, into heaven; which the apostle to the Hebrews calls the "City which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." So vain and groundless is the imagination of those, who trust to be saved by an idle and ineffectual faith, without holiness and obedience of life. Gen. iv. 7. Isa. iii. 10, 11. Mat. xix. 17.

II. I proceed now, in the second place, to convince us all, if it may be, of the necessity of minding religion and our souls. When we call any thing necessary, we mean that it is so in order to some end, which cannot be attained without it. We call those things the necessaries of life, without which men cannot subsist and live in a tolerable condition in this

world: and that is necessary to our eternal happiness, without which it cannot be attained.

Now happiness being our chief end, whatever is necessary to that, is more necessary than any thing else: and in comparison of that, all other things not only may, but ought to be neglected by us.

Now to convince men of the necessity of religion, I shall briefly shew, That it is a certain way to happiness: That it is certain that there is no other way but this: And that if we neglect religion, we shall certainly be extremely and for ever miserable.

First, That religion is a certain way to happiness. And for this we have God's express declaration and promise: the best assurance that can be. He that cannot lie, hath promised "eternal life to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality." All the happiness that we can desire, and of which the nature of man is capable, is promised to us upon the terms of religion; upon our "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world." A mighty reward for a little service; an eternity of happiness, of joys unspeakable and full of glory, for the diligence and industry of a few days: a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as our souls.

Secondly, It is certain also that there is no other way to happiness but this. He, who alone can make us happy, hath promised it to us upon these and no other terms. He hath said, that "If we live after the flesh, we shall die; but if by the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live:" that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" and that he that lives in the habitual practice of any vice, of covetousness, or adultery, or malice, or revenge,

" shall not enter into the kingdom of God." And we have reason to believe him concerning the terms of this happiness, and the means of attaining it, by whose favour and bounty alone we hope to be made partakers of it.

And if God had not said it in his word, yet the nature and reason of the thing doth plainly declare it. For religion is not only a condition of our happiness, but a necessary qualification and disposition for it. We must be like to God in the temper of our minds, before we can find any felicity in the enjoyment of him. Men must be purged from their lusts, and from those ill-natured and devilish passions of malice, and envy, and revenge, before they can be fit company for their heavenly Father, and meet to dwell with him "who is love, and dwells in love."

Thirdly, If we neglect religion, we shall certainly be extremely and for ever miserable. The Word of Truth hath said it, that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Nay, if God should hold his hand, and should inflict no positive torment upon sinners, yet they could not spare themselves, but would be their own executioners and tormentors. The guilt of that wicked life which they had led in this world, and the stings of their own consciences, must necessarily make them miserable, whenever their own thoughts are let loose upon them; as they will certainly be in the other world, when they shall have nothing either of pleasure or business to divert them.

So that if we be concerned either to be happy hereafter, or to avoid those miseries which are great and dreadful beyond all imagination, it will be necessary for us to mind religion; without which we

can neither attain that happiness, nor escape those miseries.

All that now remains is, to persuade you and myself seriously to mind this one thing necessary. And to this end, I shall apply my discourse to two sorts of persons; those who are remiss in a matter of so great concernment, and those who are grossly careless and mind it not at all.

First, To those who are remiss in a matter of such vast concernment: who mind the business of religion, in some degree, but not so heartily and vigorously as a matter of such infinite consequence doth require and deserve.

And here I fear the very best are greatly defective; and so much the more to be blamed, by how much they are more convinced than others, of the necessity of a religious and holy life, and that without this no man shall ever be admitted into the mansions of the blessed: they believe likewise, that according to the degrees of every man's holiness and virtue in this life, will be the degrees of his happiness in the other; "that he that sows sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that sows plentifully shall reap plentifully;" and that the measure of every man's reward shall be according to his improvement of the talents that were committed to him.

But how little do men live under the power of these convictions? and notwithstanding we are allured by the most glorious promises and hopes, and awed by the greatest fears, and urged by the most forcible argument in the world, the evident necessity of the thing; yet, how faintly do we run the race that is set before us? How frequently and how easily are we stopped or diverted in our Christian course, by very little temptations? How cold, and

how careless, and how inconstant are we in the exercises of piety, and how defective in every part of our duty? Did we act reasonably, and as men use to do in matters of much less moment, we could not be so indifferent about a thing so necessary, so slight and careless in a matter of life and death, and upon which all eternity doth depend.

Let us then shake off this sloth and security, and resolve to make that the great business of time, which is our great concernment to all eternity: and when we are immersed in the cares and business of this life, and troubled about many things, let this thought often come into our minds, that there is "one thing needful;" and which therefore deserves above all other things to be regarded by us.

Secondly, There is another sort of persons, who are grossly careless of this one thing necessary, and do not seem to mind it at all: who go on securely in an evil course, as if either they had no souls, or no concernment for them. I may say to these as the master of the ship did to Jonah, when he was fast asleep in the storm, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God." When our souls are every moment in danger of sinking, it is high time for us to awake out of sleep, to ply every oar, and to use all possible care and industry to save a thing so precious from a danger so threatening and so terrible.

We are apt enough to be sensible of the force of this argument of necessity in other cases, and very carefully to provide against the pressing necessities of this life, and how to avoid those great temporal evils of poverty and disgrace, of pain and suffering: but the great necessity of all, and that which is mainly incumbent upon us, is to provide for eternity,

to secure the everlasting happiness, and to prevent the endless and insupportable miseries of another world. This, this, is the one thing necessary; and to this we ought to bend and apply all our care and endeavours.

If we would fairly compare the necessity of things, and wisely weigh the concernments of this life and the other in a just and equal balance, we should be ashamed to misplace our diligence and industry as we do; to bestow our best thoughts and time about these vain and perishing things, and to take no care about that "better part which cannot be taken from us." Fond and vain men that we are; who are so solicitous how we shall pass a few days in this world, but matter not what shall become of us for ever!

But as careless as we are now about these things, time will come when we shall sadly lay them to heart, and when they will touch us to the quick: when we come to lie upon a death-bed, if God shall be pleased to grant us then so much time and use of our reason as to be able to recollect ourselves, we shall then be convinced how great a necessity there was of minding our souls, and of the prodigious folly of neglecting them, and of our not being sensible of the value of them, till we are ready to despair of saving them.

But, blessed be God, this is not yet our case, though we know not how soon it may be. Let us then be wise, and consider these things in time, lest death and despair should overtake and oppress us at once.

You that are young, be pleased to consider that this is the best opportunity of your lives, for the minding and doing of this work. You are now most capable of the best impressions, before the habits of vice have taken deep root, "and your hearts be hardened

through the deceitfulness of sin:" this "is the acceptable time, this is the day of salvation."

And there is likewise a very weighty consideration to be urged upon those that are old, if there be any that are willing to own themselves so; that this is the last opportunity of their lives, and therefore they should lay hold of it, and improve it with all their might. For it will soon be past, and when it is, nothing can call it back.

It is but a very little while before we shall all certainly be of this mind—That the best thing we could have done in this world, was to prepare for the other. Could I represent to you that invisible world which I am speaking of, you would all readily assent to this counsel, and would be glad to follow it, and put it speedily in practice. Do but then open your eyes, and look a little before you to the things which are not far off from any of us, and to many of us may perhaps be much nearer than we are aware. Let us but judge of things now, as we shall all shortly judge of them: and let us live now, as after a few days we shall every one of us wish with all our souls that we had lived; and be as serious, as if we were ready to step into the other world, and to enter upon that change which death will quickly make in every one of us. Strange stupidity of men! That a change so near, so great, so certain, should affect us so coldly, and be so little considered and provided for by us: that the things of time should move us so much, and the things of eternity so little! What will we do when this change comes, if we have made no preparation for it?

If we be Christians, and do verily believe the things which I am speaking of, and that after a few days more are passed, death will come, and draw aside

that thick veil of sense and security which now hides these things from us; and shew us that fearful and amazing sight which we are now so loath to think upon: I say, if we believe this, it is time for us to be wise and serious.

And happy that man, who, in the days of his health, hath retired himself from the noise and tumult of this world, and made that careful preparation for death and a better life, as may give him that constancy and firmness of spirit, as to be able to bear the thoughts and approaches of this great change without amazement; and to have a mind almost equally poised between that strong inclination of nature which makes us desirous to live, and that wiser dictate of reason and religion, which should make us willing and contented to die whenever God thinks fit.

Many of us do not now so clearly discern these things, because our eyes are dazzled with the false light and splendour of earthly felicity: but this assuredly is of more worth than all "the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," to be able to possess our souls at such a time, and to be at perfect peace with our own minds, having our hearts fixed trusting in God: to have our accounts made up, and estate of our immortal souls as well settled and secured, as, by the assistance of God's grace, human care and endeavour, though mixed with such human frailty, is able to do.

And if we be convinced of these things, we are utterly inexcusable if we do not make this our first and great care, and prefer it to all other interests whatsoever. And to this end, we should resolutely disentangle ourselves from worldly cares and encumbrances; at least so far, that we may have compe-

tent liberty and leisure to attend this great concernment; and to put our souls into a fit posture and preparation for another world: that when sickness and death shall come, we may not act our last part indecently and confusedly, and have a great deal of work to do when we shall want both time and all other advantages to do it in: whereby our souls, when they shall stand most in need of comfort and support, will unavoidably be left in a trembling and disconsolate condition, and in an anxious doubtfulness of mind what will become of them for ever.

To conclude: this care of religion and our souls is a thing so necessary, that in comparison of it we are to neglect the very necessaries of live. So our Lord teacheth us, "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Matth. vi. 31, 33. The calls of God and religion are so very pressing and importunate, that they admit of no delay or excuse whatsoever: this our Saviour signifies to us by denying the disciple, whom he had called to follow him, leave to go and bury his father; "Let the dead (says he,) bury their dead, but do thou follow me."

There is one thing needful; and that is, the business of religion and the care of our immortal souls, which, whatever else we neglect, should be carefully minded and regarded by every one of us. O that there were such a heart in us! O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end! Which God grant we may all do, in this our day, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXV.

OF THE ETERNITY OF HELL TORMENTS.

[Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, March 7, 1689-90.]

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.—MATTH. XXV. 46.

AMONG all the arguments to repentance and a good life, those have the greatest force and power upon the minds of men, which are fetched from another world; and from the final state of good and bad men after this life. And this our Saviour represents to us in a most lively manner, in that prospect which, in the latter part of this chapter, he gives us of the judgment of the great day; namely, that at the end of the world the "Son of man shall come in his glory, with his holy angels, and shall sit upon the throne of his glory; and all nations shall be gathered before him," and shall be separated into two great companies, the righteous and the wicked; who shall stand the one on the right hand, and the other on the left of this great Judge, who shall pronounce sentence severally upon them according to the actions which they have done in this life: the righteous shall be rewarded with eternal happiness, and the wicked shall be sentenced to everlasting punishment. "And these (that is, the wicked,) shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

The words are plain and need no explication. For I take it for granted, that every one, at first

hearing of them, does clearly apprehend the difference between the righteous and the wicked, and between endless happiness and misery: but although these words be so very easy to be understood, they can never be too much considered by us. The scope and design of them is, to represent to us the different fates of good and bad men in another world, and that their ends there, will be as different as their ways and doings have been here in this world: the serious consideration whereof is the greatest discouragement to sin, and the most powerful argument in the world to a holy and virtuous life: because it is an argument taken from our greatest and most lasting interest, our happiness or our misery to all eternity: a concernment of that vast consequence, that it must be the greatest stupidity and folly in the world for any man to neglect it.

This eternal state of rewards and punishments in another world, our blessed Saviour hath clearly revealed to us. And as to one part of it, viz. That good men shall be eternally happy in another world, every one gladly admits it: but many are loath that the other part should be true, concerning the eternal punishment of wicked men. And therefore, they pretend that it is contrary to the justice of God to punish temporary crimes with eternal torments: because justice always observes a proportion between offences and punishments; but between temporary sins and eternal punishments there is no proportion. And as this seems hard to be reconciled with justice, so much more with that excess of goodness which we suppose to be in God.

And therefore they say, that though God seem to have declared that impenitent sinners shall be everlastingly punished, yet these declarations of

Scripture are so to be mollified and understood, as that we may be able to reconcile them with the essential perfections of the Divine nature.

This is the full force and strength of the objection: and my work at this time shall be to clear, if I can, this difficult point. And that for these two reasons: First, For the vindication of the Divine justice and goodness—"That God may be justified in his sayings, and appear righteous when he judgeth." And, Secondly, Because the belief of the threatenings of God in their utmost extent is of so great moment to a good life, and so great a discouragement to sin: for the sting of sin is the terror of eternal punishment; and if men were once set free from the fear and belief of this, the most powerful restraint from sin would be taken away.

So that, in answer to this objection, I shall endeavour to prove these two things:

First, That the eternal punishment of wicked men in another world is plainly threatened in Scripture.

Secondly, That this is not inconsistent either with the justice or the goodness of God.

First, That the eternal punishment of wicked men in another world is plainly threatened in Scripture; namely, in these following texts: (Matth. xviii. 8.) "It is better for thee to enter into life halt and maimed, than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire." And, (Matth. xxv. 41.) "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." And here in the text, "These (that is, the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment." And Mark ix. it is there three several times with great vehemency repeated by our Saviour, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire

is not quenched." And (2 Thess. i. 9.) speaking of them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son, it is said of them, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction."

I know very well that great endeavour hath been used to avoid the force of these texts, by shewing that the words, *for ever* and *everlasting*, are frequently used in Scripture in a more limited sense; only for a long duration and continuance. Thus, for ever, doth very often in the Old Testament only signify for a long time and till the end of the Jewish dispensation. And in the epistle of St. Jude, (verse 7th,) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are said to be set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire; that is, of a fire that was not extinguished till those cities were utterly consumed.

And, therefore, to clear the meaning of the aforementioned texts. First, I shall readily grant, that the words, for ever and everlasting, do not always in Scripture signify an endless duration; and that this is sufficiently proved by the instances alleged to this purpose. But then, Secondly, it cannot be denied, on the other hand, that these words are often in Scripture used in a larger sense, and so as necessarily to signify an interminable and endless duration. As, where eternity is attributed to God, and he is said to live for ever and ever: and where eternal happiness in another world is promised to good men, and that they shall be for ever with the Lord. Now the very same words and expressions are used concerning the punishment of wicked men in another life, and there is great reason why we should understand them in the same extent: both because if God had intended to have told us that the punishment of wicked men shall have no end, the languages where-

in the Scriptures are written do hardly afford fuller and more certain words, than those that are used in this case, whereby to express to us a duration without end: and likewise, which is almost a peremptory decision of the thing, because the duration of the punishment of the wicked men is in the very same sentence expressed by the very same word which is used for the duration of the happiness of the righteous: as is evident from the text, "These (speaking of the wicked,) shall go away, εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, into eternal punishment, but the righteous, εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, into life eternal." I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed; namely, To shew that this is not inconsistent either with the justice or the goodness of God. For in this the force of the objection lies. And it hath been attempted to be answered several ways, none of which seems to me to give clear and full satisfaction to it.

First, It is said by some, that because sin is infinite in respect of the object against whom it is committed, which is God, therefore it deserves an infinite punishment.

But this I doubt will upon examination be found to have more of subtlety than of solidity in it. It is true, indeed, that the dignity of the person against whom any offence is committed is a great aggravation of the fault. For which reason all offences against God are certainly the greatest of all other: but that crimes should hereby be heightened to an infinite degree, can by no means be admitted; and that for this plain reason; because then the evil and demerit of all sins must necessarily be equal; for the demerit of no sin can be more than infinite: and if the demerit of all sins be equal, there can then be no reason for the degrees of punishment in another

world: but to deny that there are degrees of punishment there, is not only contrary to reason, but to our Saviour's express assertion, that some shall be beaten with many stripes and some with fewer, and that it shall be more tolerable for some in the day of judgment than for others. Besides that, by the same reason that the least sin that is committed against God may be said to be infinite because of its object, the least punishment that is inflicted by God may be said to be infinite because of its author; and then all punishments from God as well as all sins against him would be equal, which is palpably absurd. So that this answer is by no means sufficient to break the force of this objection.

Secondly, It is said by others, that if wicked men lived for ever in this world they would sin for ever, and therefore they deserve to be punished for ever. But this hath neither truth nor reason enough in it to give satisfaction. For who can certainly tell, that if a man lived never so long he would never repent and grow better?

Besides that, the justice of God doth only punish the sins which men have committed in this life, and not those which they might possibly have committed if they had lived longer.

Thirdly, It is said in the last place, that God doth set before men everlasting happiness and misery, and the sinner hath his choice. Here are two things said which seem to bid fairly towards an answer.

First, That the reward which God promiseth to our obedience is equal to the punishment which he threatens to our disobedience; but yet this I doubt will not reach the business: because, though it be not contrary to justice to exceed in rewards, that

being matter of mere favour; yet it may be so to exceed in punishments.

Secondly, It is further said, that the sinner in this case hath nothing to complain of, since he hath his own choice. This I confess is enough to silence the sinner, and to make him to acknowledge that his destruction is of himself; but yet, for all that, it does not seem so clearly to satisfy the objection from the disproportion between the fault and the punishment.

And therefore I shall endeavour to clear, if it may be, this matter yet a little further, by these following considerations.

First, Let it be considered, that the measure of penalties with respect to crimes, is not only, nor always, to be taken from the quality and degree of the offence, much less from the duration and continuance of it, but from the ends and reasons of government; which require such penalties as may, if it be possible, secure the observation of the law, and deter men from the breach of it. And the reason of this is evident; because, if it were once declared, that no man should suffer longer for any crime than according to the proportion of the time in which it was committed, the consequence of this would be, that sinners would be better husbands of their time, and sin so much the faster, that they might have the greater bargain of it, and might satisfy for their sins by a shorter punishment.

And it would be unreasonable likewise upon another account; because some of the greatest sins may perhaps be committed in the shortest time; for instance, murder; the act whereof may be over in a moment, but the effects of it are perpetual. For he that kills a man once, kills him for ever. The act

of murder may be committed in a trice, but the injury is endless and irreparable. So that this objection, of temporary crimes being punished with so much longer sufferings, is plainly of no force.

Besides that, whoever considers how ineffectual the threatening even of eternal torments is to the greatest part of sinners, will soon be satisfied, that a less penalty than that of eternal sufferings would to the far greatest part of mankind have been in all probability of little or no force. And, therefore, if any thing more terrible than eternal vengeance could have been threatened to the workers of iniquity, it had not been unreasonable, because it would all have been little enough to deter men effectually from sin.

So that what proportion crimes and penalties ought to bear to each other, is not so properly a consideration of justice, as of wisdom and prudence in the lawgiver.

And the reason of this seems very plain, because the measure of penalties is not taken from any strict proportion betwixt crimes and punishments; but from one great end and design of government, which is to secure the observation of wholesome and necessary laws; and consequently, whatever penalties are proper and necessary to this end are not unjust.

And this consideration I desire may be more especially observed, because it strikes at the very foundation of the objection. For if the appointing and apportioning of penalties to crimes be not so properly a consideration of justice, but rather of prudence in the lawgiver; then, whatever the disproportion may be between temporary sins and eternal sufferings, justice cannot be said to be concerned in it.

Justice indeed is concerned, that the righteous

and the wicked should not be treated alike; and farther yet, that greater sins should have a heavier punishment, and that mighty sinners should be mightily tormented; but all this may be considered and adjusted in the degree and in the intenseness of the suffering, without making any difference in the duration of it.

The case then in short stands thus:—Whenever we break the laws of God we fall into his hands and lie at his mercy, and he may, without injustice, inflict what punishment upon us he pleaseth: and consequently, to secure his law from violation, he may beforehand threaten what penalties he thinks fit and necessary to deter men from the transgression of it. And this is not esteemed unjust among men, to punish crimes, that are committed in an instant, with the perpetual loss of estate, or liberty, or life.

Secondly, This will yet appear more reasonable, when we consider, that after all, he that threatens hath still the power of execution in his own hands. For there is this remarkable difference between promises and threatenings—that he who promiseth passeth over a right to another, and thereby stands obliged to him in justice and faithfulness to make good his promise; and if he do not, the party to whom the promise is made is not only disappointed, but injuriously dealt withal: but in threatenings it is quite otherwise. He that threatens keeps the right of punishing in his own hand, and is not obliged to execute what he hath threatened any further than the reasons and ends of government do require: and he may without any injury to the party threatened remit and abate as much as he pleaseth of the punishment that he hath threatened: and because in

so doing he is not worse but better than his word, nobody can find fault, or complain of any wrong or injustice thereby done to him.

Nor is this any impeachment of God's truth and faithfulness, any more than it is esteemed among men a piece of falsehood not to do what they have threatened. God did absolutely threaten the destruction of the city of Nineveh; and his peevish prophet did understand the threatening to be absolute, and was very angry with God for employing him in a message that was not made good. But God understood his own right, and did what he pleased notwithstanding the threatening he had denounced; and for all Jonah was so touched in honour, that he had rather have died himself than that Nineveh should not have been destroyed, only to have verified his message.

I know it is said in this case, that God hath confirmed these threatenings by an oath, which is a certain sign of the immutability of his counsel; and therefore his truth is concerned in the strict and rigorous execution of them. The land of Canaan was a type of heaven, and the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness were also a type of impenitent sinners under the gospel; consequently the oath of God concerning the rebellious Israelites, when he sware in his wrath "that they should not enter into his rest," that is, into the land of Canaan, doth equally oblige him to execute his threatening upon all impenitent sinners under the gospel, "that they shall never enter into the kingdom of God." And this is very truly reasoned, so far as the threatening extends; which, if we attend to the plain words of it, beyond which threatenings are never to be stretched, doth not seem to reach any further than to the ex-

clusion of impenitent sinners out of heaven, and their falling finally short of the rest and happiness of the righteous. Which, however, directly overthrows the opinion ascribed to Origen, that the devils and wicked men shall all be saved at last; God having "sworn in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest."

But then, as to the eternal misery and punishment threatened to wicked men in the other world, though it be not necessarily comprehended in this oath, that they "shall not enter into his rest;" yet we are to consider, that both the tenor of the sentence which our blessed Saviour hath assured us will be passed upon them at the judgment of the great day, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire;" and likewise this declaration in the text, "that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment," though they do not restrain God from doing what he pleases, yet they cut off from the sinner all reasonable hopes of the relaxation or mitigation of them. For since the great Judge of the world hath made so plain and express a declaration, and will certainly pass such a sentence, it would be the greatest folly and madness in the world for the sinner to entertain any hope of escaping it, and to venture his soul upon that hope.

I know but one thing more, commonly said upon this argument, that seems material. And that is this, that the words, death and destruction and perishing, whereby the punishment of wicked men in the other world is most frequently expressed in Scripture, do most properly import annihilation and an utter end of being; and therefore may reasonably be so understood in the matter of which we are now speaking.

To this I answer, that these words and those which answer them in other languages, are often both in Scripture and other authors, used to signify a state of great misery and suffering, without the utter extinction of the miserable. Thus God is often in Scripture said to bring destruction upon a nation, when he sends great judgments upon them, though they do not exterminate and make an utter end of them.

And nothing is more common in most languages, than by *perishing* to express a person's being undone and made very miserable. As in that known passage in Tiberius's letter to the Roman senate:* "Let all the gods and goddesses (saith he,) destroy me worse than at this very time I feel myself to perish," &c. in which saying, the words, destroy and perish, are both of them used to express the miserable anguish and torment which at that time he felt in his mind, as Tacitus tells us at large.

* Ita me Dii Deæque omnes pejus perdant quam hodie perire me sentio, &c.

And as for the word death; a state of misery which is as bad or worse than death may properly enough be called by that name: and for this reason the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgment is in the book of the Revelation so frequently and fitly called the second death. And the lake of fire, into which the wicked shall be cast to be tormented in it, is expressly called "the second death."

Rev. xx. 14.

But besides this, they that argue from the force of these words, that the punishment of wicked men in the other world shall be nothing else but an utter end of their being, do necessarily fall into two great inconveniences.

First, that hereby they exclude all positive punish-

ment and torment of sinners. For if the second death, and to be destroyed, and to perish, signify nothing else but the annihilation of sinners, and an utter extinction of their being; and if this be all the effect of that dreadful sentence which shall be passed upon them at the day of judgment, then the fire of hell is quenched all at once, and is only a frightful metaphor without any meaning. But this is directly contrary to the tenor of Scripture, which doth so often describe the punishment of wicked men in hell by positive torments: and particularly our blessed Saviour, describing the lamentable state of the damned in hell, expressly says, that there "shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth;" which cannot be, if annihilation be all the meaning and effect of the sentence of the great day.

Secondly, Another inconvenience of this opinion is, that if annihilation be all the punishment of sinners in the other world, then the punishment of all sinners must of necessity be equal, because there are no degrees of annihilation, or not being. But this also is most directly contrary to Scripture, as I have already shewn.

I know very well that some who are of this opinion do allow a very long and tedious time of the most terrible and intolerable torment of sinners, and after that they believe that there shall be an utter end of their being.

But then they must not argue this from the force of the words before-mentioned, because the plain inference from thence is, that annihilation is all the punishment that wicked men shall undergo in the next life: and if that be not true, as I have plainly shewn that it is not, I do not see from what other words or expressions in Scripture they can find the

least ground for this opinion—that the torment of wicked men shall at last end in their annihilation. And yet, admitting all this, for which I think there is no ground at all in Scripture, I cannot see what great comfort sinners can take in the thought of a tedious time of terrible torment, ending at last in annihilation, and the utter extinction of their beings.

Thirdly, We may consider farther, that the primary end of all threatenings is not punishment, but the prevention of it. For God does not threaten that men may sin and be punished, but that they may not sin, and so may escape the punishment threatened. And therefore the higher the threatening runs, so much the more mercy and goodness there is in it; because it is so much the more likely to hinder men from incurring the penalty that is threatened.

Fourthly, Let it be considered likewise, that when it is so very plain that God hath threatened eternal misery to impenitent sinners, all the prudence in the world obliges men to believe that he is in good earnest, and will execute these threatenings upon them, if they will obstinately stand it out with him, and will not be brought to repentance. And therefore in all reason we ought so to demean ourselves and so to persuade others, as knowing the terror of the Lord, and that they who wilfully break his laws are in danger of eternal death. To which I will add, in the

Fifth and last place, That if we suppose that God did intend that his threatenings should have their effect to deter men from the breach of his laws, it cannot be imagined that, in the same revelation which declares these threatenings, any intimation should be given of the abatement or non-execution

of them. For by this God would have weakened his own laws, and have taken off the edge and terror of his threatenings: because a threatening hath quite lost its force, if we once come to believe that it will not be executed: and, consequently, it would be a very impious design to go about to teach or persuade any thing to the contrary, and a betraying men into that misery, which, had it been firmly believed, might have been avoided.

We are all bound to preach, and you and I are all bound to believe, the terrors of the Lord. Not so, as saucily to determine and pronounce what God must do in this case; for after all, he may do what he will, as I have clearly shewn: but what is fit for us to do, and what we have reason to expect, if, notwithstanding a plain and express threatening of the vengeance of eternal fire, we still go on "to treasure up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God:" and will desperately put it to the hazard, whether, and how far, God will execute his threatenings upon sinners in another world.

And, therefore, there is no need why we should be very solicitously concerned for the honour of God's justice or goodness in this matter. Let us but take care to believe and avoid the threatenings of God; and then, how terrible soever they are, no harm can come to us. And as for God, let us not doubt but that he will take care of his own honour; and that he, "who is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works," will do nothing that is repugnant to his eternal goodness and righteousness; and that he will certainly so manage things at the judgment of the great day, as "to be justified in his sayings, and to be righteous when we are judged." For notwithstand-

ing his threatenings, he hath reserved power enough in his own hands to do right to all his perfections; so that we may rest assured, that he will "judge the world in righteousness;" and if it be any wise inconsistent either with righteousness or goodness, which he knows much better than we do, to make sinners miserable for ever, that he will not do it; nor is it credible, that he would threaten sinners with a punishment which he could not execute upon them.

Therefore sinners ought always to be afraid of it, and reckon upon it; and always to remember, that there is great goodness and mercy in the severity of God's threatenings; and that nothing will more justify the infliction of eternal torments, than the foolish presumption of sinners in venturing upon them, notwithstanding such plain and terrible threatenings.

This, I am sure, is a good argument to all of us, to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" and with all possible care to endeavour the prevention of that misery which is so terribly severe, that at present we can hardly tell how to reconcile it with the justice and goodness of God.

This God heartily desires we would do: and hath solemnly sworn, that "he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." So that here is all imaginable care taken to prevent our miscarriage, and all the assurance that the God of truth can give us of his unwillingness to bring this misery upon us. And both these, I am sure, are arguments of great goodness. For what can goodness do more than to warn of this misery, and earnestly persuade us to prevent it; and to threaten us so very terribly, on purpose to deter us from so great a danger?

And if this will not prevail with us, but we will

go still on to "despise the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance;" what in reason remains for us, "but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume us?" And what almost can justice, or even goodness itself do less, than to inflict that punishment upon us, which with eyes open we would wilfully run upon; and which no warning, no persuasion, no importunity could prevail with us to avoid? And when, as the apostle says, "knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death;" yet, for all that, we would venture to commit them.

And, therefore, whatever we suffer, we do but inherit our own choice, and have no reason to complain of God, who hath set before us life and death, eternal happiness and misery, and hath left us to be the carvers of our own fortune: and if, after all this, we will obstinately refuse this happiness, and wilfully run upon this misery, "Woe unto us! for we have rewarded evil to ourselves."

You see, then, by all that hath been said upon this argument, what we have all reason to expect, if we will still go on in our sins, and will not be brought to repentance. You have heard, what a terrible punishment the just God hath threatened to the workers of iniquity; and that in as plain words as can be used to express any thing. "These (that is, the wicked,) shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Here are life and death, happiness and misery, set before us. Not this frail and mortal life, which is hardly worth the having, were it not in order to a better and happier life; nor a temporal death, to get above the dread whereof should not methinks be difficult to us, were it not for the bitter and terrible

consequences of it: but an eternal life, and an eternal enjoyment of all things which can render life pleasant and happy; and a perpetual death, which will for ever torment us, but never make an end of us.

These God propounds to our choice; and if the consideration of them will not prevail with us to leave our sins, and to reform our lives, what will? Weightier motives cannot be proposed to the understanding of man, than everlasting punishment, and life eternal; than the greatest and most durable happiness, and the most intolerable and lasting misery that human nature is capable of.

Now, considering in what terms the threatenings of the gospel are expressed, we have all the reason in the world to believe that the punishment of sinners in another world will be everlasting. However, we cannot be certain of the contrary, time enough to prevent it; nor till we come there and find by experience how it is: and if it prove so, it will then be too late either to prevent that terrible doom, or to get it reversed.

Some comfort themselves with the uncomfortable and uncertain hope of being discharged out of being, and reduced to their first nothing; at least after the tedious and terrible suffering of the most grievous and exquisite torments for innumerable ages. And if this should happen to be true, good God! how feeble, how cold a comfort is this! Where is the reason and understanding of men, to make this their last refuge and hope; and to lean upon it as a matter of mighty consolation, that they shall be miserable beyond all imagination, and beyond all patience, for God knows how many ages? "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" No right sense and judgment of things? No consideration and care

of themselves, no concernment for their own lasting interest and happiness?

Origen, I know not for what good reason, is said to have been of opinion, that the punishment of devils and wicked men, after the day of judgment, will continue but for a thousand years; and that after that time, they shall all be finally saved. I can very hardly persuade myself, that so wise and learned a man as Origen was, should be positive in an opinion for which there can be no certain ground in reason, especially for the punctual and precise term of a thousand years; and for which there is no ground at all, that I know of, from Divine revelation.

But upon the whole matter, however it be; be it for a thousand years, or be it for a longer and unknown term, or be it for ever, which is plainly threatened in the gospel; I say, however it be, this is certain, that it is infinitely wiser to take care to avoid it, than to dispute it, and to run the final hazard of it. Put it which way we will, especially if we put it at the worst, as in all prudence we ought to do, it is by all possible means to be provided against: so terrible, so intolerable is the thought, yea, the very least suspicion, of being miserable for ever!

And now, give me leave to ask you, as St. Paul did King Agrippa, "Do you believe the Scriptures?" And I hope I may answer for you myself, as he did for Agrippa, "I know you do believe them." And in them these things are clearly revealed, and are part of that creed of which we make a solemn profession every day.

And yet, when we consider how most men live, is it credible that they do firmly believe this plain declaration of our Saviour and our Judge, that "the

wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal?"

Or if they do in some sort believe it, is it credible that they do at all consider it seriously, and lay it to heart? So that if we have a mind to reconcile our belief with our actions, we must either alter our Bible and our creed, or we must change our lives.

Let us then consider, and shew ourselves men. And if we do so, can any man, to please himself for a little while, be contented to be punished for ever; and, for the shadow of a short and imperfect happiness in this life, be willing to run the hazard of being really and extremely miserable in the next world?

Surely this consideration alone, of the extreme and endless misery of impenitent sinners in another world, if it were but well wrought into our minds, would be sufficient to kill all the temptations of this world, and to lay them dead at our feet; and to make us deaf to all the enchantments of sin and vice: because they bid us so infinitely to our loss, when they offer us the enjoyment of a short pleasure, upon so very hard and unequal a condition as that of being miserable for ever.

The eternal rewards and punishments of another life, which are the great sanction and security of God's laws, one would think should be a sufficient weight to cast the scales against any pleasure, or any pain, that this world can tempt, or threaten us withal.

And yet, after all this, will we still go on to do wickedly, when we know the terrors of the Lord, and that we must one day answer all our bold violations of his law, and contempts of his authority,

with the loss of our immortal souls, and by suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

What is it then that can give men the heart and courage—but I recal that word, because it is not true courage, but fool-hardiness—thus to out-brave the judgment of God, and to set at nought the horrible and amazing consideration of a miserable eternity? How is it possible that men that are awake, and in their wits, should have any ease in their minds, or enjoy so much as one quiet hour, whilst so great a danger hangs over their heads, and they have taken no tolerable care to prevent it? If we have any true and just sense of this danger, we cannot fail to shew that we have it, by making haste to escape it, and by taking that care of our souls, which is due to immortal spirits, that are made to be happy or miserable to all eternity.

Let us not therefore estimate and measure things, as they appear now to our sensual and deluded and depraved judgments; but let us open our eyes, and look to the last issue and consequence of them: let us often think of these things, and consider well with ourselves, what apprehensions will then probably fill and possess our mind, when we shall stand trembling before our judge in a fearful expectation of that terrible sentence which is just ready to be pronounced, and as soon as ever it is pronounced, to be executed upon us: when we shall have a full and clear sight of the unspeakable happiness, and of the horrible and astonishing miseries of another world: when there shall be no longer any veil of flesh and sense to interpose between them and us, and to hide these things from our eyes: and, in a word, when heaven, with all the glories of it, shall be

open to our view; and, as the expression is in Job, "Hell shall be naked before us, and destruction shall have no covering."

How shall we then be confounded, to find the truth and reality of those things which we will not now be persuaded to believe? And how shall we then wish, that we had believed the terrors of the Lord; and, instead of quarrelling with the principles of religion, and calling them into question, we had lived under the constant sense and awe of them.

Blessed be God, that there is yet hope concerning us, and that we may yet flee from the wrath to come; and that the miseries of eternity may yet be prevented in time: and that, for this very end and purpose, our most gracious and merciful God hath so clearly revealed these things to us, not with a desire to bring them upon us, but that we, being warned by his threatenings, might not bring them upon ourselves.

I will conclude all with the counsel of the wise man: "Seek not death in the error of your life, and pull not upon yourselves destruction with the works of your own hands. For God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living; but ungodly men with their works and words have called it down upon themselves." Which, that none of us may do, God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever. Amen.

Wisdom of Solomon, ch. i. ver. 12, 13. 16.

SERMON XXXVI.

SUCCESS NOT ALWAYS ANSWERABLE TO THE PROBABILITY OF SECOND CAUSES.

[Being a Fast-Sermon preached before the House of Commons, on Wednesday, April 16, 1690.]

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.—Eccles. ix. 11.

Next to the acknowledgment of God's being, nothing is more essential to religion, than the belief of his providence, and a constant dependance upon him, as the great governor of the world, and the wise disposer of all the affairs and concernments of the children of men: and nothing can be a greater argument of providence, than that there is such an order of causes laid in nature, that in ordinary course every thing does usually attain its end; and yet that there is such a mixture of contingency, as that now and then, we cannot tell how nor why, the most likely causes do deceive us, and fail of producing their usual effects.

For if there be a God and a providence, it is reasonable that things should be thus: because a providence does suppose all things to have been at first wisely framed and with a fitness to attain their end; but yet it does also suppose that God hath reserved to himself a power and liberty to interpose, and to

cross as he pleases, the usual course of things; to awaken men to the consideration of him, and a continual dependance upon him; and to teach us to ascribe those things to his wise disposal, which, if we never saw any change, we should be apt to impute to blind necessity. And therefore the wise man, to bring us to an acknowledgment of the Divine providence, tells us that thus he had observed things to be in this world—that though they generally happen according to the probability of second causes, yet sometimes they fall out quite otherwise: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," &c.

The connexion of which words with the foregoing discourse, is briefly this. Among many other observations which the wise preacher makes in this sermon of the vanity and uncertainty of all things in this world, and of the mistakes of men about them, he takes notice here in the text, and in the verse before it, of two extremes of human life: some, because of the uncertainty of all worldly things, cast off all care and diligence, and neglect the use of proper and probable means; having found by experience, that when men have done all they can, they many times fail of their end, and are disappointed they know not how: others, on the contrary, rely so much upon their own skill and industry, as to promise success to themselves in all their undertakings, and presume so much upon second causes, as if no consideration at all were to be had of the first.

The wise preacher reproves both these extremes, and shews the folly and vanity of them. On the one hand, of those who sit still, and will use no care and endeavour, because it may all happen to be disappointed, and to fail of success: not considering,

that though prudent care and diligence will not always do the business, yet there is nothing to be done without them, in the ordinary course of things; and that in the order of second causes these are the most likely and effectual means to any end: and therefore, rejecting this lazy principle, he counsels men, whatever they purpose to themselves, to be very diligent and vigorous in the use of proper means for the attainment of it, in the verse immediately before the text, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

But then he observes also, as great a folly and vanity on the other hand; that they who managed their affairs with great wisdom and industry, are apt to presume and reckon upon the certain success of them, without taking into consideration, that which in all human affairs is most considerable, the favour and blessing of that almighty and wise Providence which rules the world: "I returned, (says he,) and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," &c.

"I returned and saw;" that is, having considered on the one hand the folly of sloth and carelessness, I turned mine eyes the other way, and saw as great an error on the other hand; in men's presuming too much upon their own diligence and conduct, without taking notice of the providence of God. For I have found (says Solomon), by manifold observations, that the success of things does not always answer the probability of second causes and means. So that the sum of the preacher's advice is this: When thou propoundest any end to thyself, be diligent and vigorous in the use of means; and when thou hast done all, look above and beyond these to a superior Cause which overrules, and steers, and stops, as he pleases,

all the motions and activity of second causes: and be not confident that all things are ever so wisely and firmly laid, that they cannot fail of success. For the providence of God doth many times step in to divert the most probable event of things, and to turn it quite another way: and whenever he pleases to do so, the most strong and likely means do fall lame, or stumble, or by some accident or other come short of their end.

"I returned and saw under the sun;" that is, here below, in this inferior world.

"That the race is not to the swift:" this the Chaldee paraphrast does understand with relation to warlike affairs. "I beheld," says he, "and saw, that they who are swift as eagles do not always escape in the day of battle." But I choose rather to understand the words in their more obvious sense, that in a race many things may happen to hinder him that is swiftest from winning it.

"Nor the battle to the strong;" that is, victory and success in war does not always attend the greatest force and preparations, nor doth that side, which in human estimation is strongest, always prevail and get the better.

"Nor yet bread to the wise;" *Neque doctorum panem esse;* so some render the words, that learned men are not always secured against poverty and want.

"Nor yet riches to men of understanding;" for so some interpreters translate the words, *Neque industriis divitias esse*, that those who take most pains do not always get the greatest estates.

"Nor yet favour to men of skill;" that is, to those who understand men and business, and how to apply themselves dexterously to the inclinations and interests of princes and great men. Others interpret

these words more generally, *Neque peritorum artificum esse gratiam*, that those who excel most in their several arts and professions, do not always meet with suitable encouragement. But because the word which is here rendered favour, is so frequently used by Solomon for the favour of princes, the former sense seems to be more easy and natural.

"But time and chance happeneth to them all;" that is, (saith Aben Ezra,) there is a secret providence of God which sometimes presents men with unexpected opportunities, and interposeth accidents which no human wisdom could foresee: which gives success to very unlikely means; and defeats the swift, and the strong, and the learned, and the industrious, and them that are best versed in men and business, of their several ends and designs.

It sometimes happens that he that is swiftest, by a fall, or by fainting, or by some other unlucky accident, may lose the race.

It sometimes falls out, that a much smaller and weaker number, by the advantage of ground, or of a pass, by a stratagem, or by a sudden surprise, or by some other accident and opportunity, may be victorious over a much greater force.

And that an unlearned man, in comparison, by favour or friends, or by some happy chance of setting out, to the best advantage, the little learning he has, may arrive at great things; when perhaps at the same time, the man that is a hundred times more learned than he, may be ready to starve.

And that men of no great parts and industry may stumble into an estate, and by some casual hit in trade, may attain such a fortune, as the man that hath toiled and drudged all his life shall never be able to reach.

And, lastly, that a man of no great ambition or design may fall into an opportunity, and by happening upon the *mollia tempora fandi*, some soft and lucky season of address, may slide into his prince's favour, and all on the sudden be hoisted up to that degree of dignity and esteem, as the designing man, who hath been laying trains to blow up his rivals, and waiting opportunities all his days to worm others out, and to skrew himself in, shall never be able to attain.

The words thus explained contain this general proposition, which shall be the subject of my following discourse :—

That in human affairs the most likely means do not always attain their end, nor does the event constantly answer the probability of second causes; but there is a secret Providence which governs and overrules all things, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most hopeful and probable designs.

In the handling of this proposition I shall do these three things :

First, I shall confirm and illustrate the truth of it, by an induction of the particulars which are instanced in, here in the text.

Secondly, I shall give some reason and account of this, why the providence of God doth sometimes interpose to hinder and defeat the most probable designs.

Thirdly, I shall draw some inferences from the whole, suitable to the occasion of this day. In all which I shall endeavour to be as brief as conveniently I can.

First, For the confirmation and illustration of this proposition, That the most likely means do not always attain their end; but there is a secret Provi-

dence which overrules and governs all events, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most probable and hopeful designs. This is the general conclusion which Solomon proves by this induction of particulars in the text. And he instanceth in the most probable means for the compassing of the several ends which most men in this world propose to themselves. And the great darlings of mankind are victory, riches, and honour: I do not mention pleasure, because that seems rather to result from the use and enjoyment of the other. Now, if a man design victory, what more probable means to overcome in a race than swiftness? what more likely to prevail in war than strength? If a man aim at riches, what more proper to raise an estate than understanding and industry? If a man aspire to honour, what more likely to prefer him to the king's favour and service than dexterity and skill in business? And yet experience shews that these means, as probable as they seem to be, are not always successful for the accomplishment of their several ends.

Or else we may suppose, that Solomon by these instances did intend to represent the chief engines and instruments of human designs and actions. Now there are five things more especially, which do eminently qualify a man for any undertaking—expedition and quickness of dispatch, strength and force, providence and forecast, diligence and industry, knowledge and insight into men and business: and some think that Solomon did intend to represent these several qualities by the several instances in the text. "The race is not to the swift;" that is, men of the greatest expedition and dispatch do not always succeed: for we see that men do sometimes outrun business, and make haste to be undone. "Nor the

battle to the strong;" that is, neither does force and strength always carry it. "Nor yet bread to the wise;" which some understand of the provident care and pains of the husbandman, whose harvest is not always answerable to his labour and hopes. "Nor yet riches to men of understanding," or industry; that is, neither is diligence in business always crowned with success. "Nor yet favour to men of skill;" that is, neither have they that have the greatest dexterity in the management of affairs always the fortune to rise. And if we take the words in this sense, the thing will come much to one: but I rather approve the first interpretation, as being less forced, and nearer to the letter.

So that the force of Solomon's reasoning is this—if the swiftest do not always win the race; nor the strongest always overcome in war; if knowledge and learning do not always secure men from want; nor industry always make men rich; nor political skill always raise men to high place; nor any other means that can be instanced in as most probable, do constantly and infallibly succeed: then it must be acknowledged, that there is some other cause which mingles itself with human affairs, and governs all events; and which can, and does when it pleases, defeat the most likely, and bring to pass the most improbable designs: and what else can that be imagined to be, but the secret and overruling providence of Almighty God? When we can find no other, we are very unreasonable if we will not admit this to be the cause of such extraordinary events, but will obstinately impute that to blind necessity or chance, which hath such plain characters upon it of a Divine power and wisdom.

I might be large upon every one of these in-

stances in the text, and illustrate them by pat and lively examples, both out of Scripture and other histories. But I shall briefly pass over all of them but the second, "The battle is not to the strong."

"The race is not to the swift." If we understand this literally, it is obvious to every man to imagine a great many accidents in a race, which may snatch victory from the swiftest runner. If we understand it as the Chaldee paraphrase does, with relation to war, that the swiftest does not always overcome or escape in the day of battle; of this Asahel is an eminent instance, who, though he was, as the Scripture tells us, "light of foot as a wild roe," yet did he not escape the spear of Abner. It seems that among the ancients, swiftness was looked upon as a great qualification in a warrior, both because it serves for a sudden assault and onset, and likewise for that which in civility we call a nimble retreat. And therefore David, in his poetical lamentation over those two great captains, Saul and Jonathan, takes particular notice of this warlike quality of theirs: "They were (says he,) swifter than eagles, stronger than lions:" and the constant character which Homer gives of Achilles, one of his principal heroes, is, that he was swift of foot. The poet feigns of him, that by some charm, or gift of the gods, he was invulnerable in all parts of his body except his heel; and that was the part to which he trusted; and in that he received his mortal wound: the wise poet hereby instructing us, that many times our greatest danger lies there, where we place our chief confidence and safety.

"Nor yet bread to the wise," or to the learned. The poverty of poets is proverbial; and there are frequent instances in history of eminently-learned per-

sons that have been reduced to great straits and necessities.

"Nor yet riches to men of understanding:" by which, whether we understand men of great parts, or of great diligence and industry, it is obvious to every man's observation, that an ordinary capacity and understanding does usually lie more level to the business of a common trade and profession, than more refined and elevated parts; which lie rather for speculation than practice, and are better fitted for the pleasure and ornament of conversation, than for the toil and drudgery of business: as a fine razor is admirable for cutting hairs, but the dull hatchet much more proper for hewing a hard and knotty piece of timber. And even when parts and industry meet together, they are many times less successful in the raising of a great estate, than men of much lower and slower understandings; because these are apt to admire riches, which is a great spur to industry; and because they are perpetually intent upon one thing, and mind but one business, from which their thoughts never straggle into vain and useless inquiries after knowledge, or news, or public affairs: all which being foreign to their business, they leave to those, who are, as they are wont to say of them in scorn, more curious, and too wise to be rich.

"Nor yet favour to men of skill." All history is full of instances of the casual advancement of men to great favour and honour, when others, who have made it their serious study and business, have fallen short of it. I could give a famous example in this kind, of the manifold and manifest disappointment of a whole order of men: the sliest and must subtle, in their generation, of all the children in this world;

the most politically instituted, and the best studied and skilled in the tempers and interests of men; the most pragmatical and cunning, to insinuate themselves into the intrigues of courts and great families; and who, by long experience, and an universal intelligence, and communicated observations, have reduced human affairs, at least as they think, to a certain art and method, and to the most steady rules that such contingent things are capable of: I believe you all guess beforehand whom I mean, even the honest Jesuits: and yet these men, of so much heart and skill, have met with as many checks and disappointments, as any sort of men ever did: they have been discountenanced by almost all princes and states, and, one time or other, banished out of most of the courts and countries of Europe. And it is no small argument of the Divine providence, that so much cunning hath met with so little countenance and success; and hath been so often so grossly infatuated, and their counsels turned into foolishness.

But I promised only to mention these, and to insist upon the second instance in the text, "I returned and saw under the sun, that the battle is not to the strong;" to the Gibborim, the giants, for so the Hebrew word signifies: in which Solomon might possibly have respect to the history of the Israelites subduing the Canaanites, a people of great strength and stature, among whom were the giants, the sons of Anak; or, more probably, to the famous encounter of his father David with the great Goliah: but however that be, the Scripture is full of examples to this purpose, that when the providence of God is pleased to interpose in favour of any side, it becomes victorious, according to the saying of King Asa in his prayer to God: "It is nothing

2 Chron. xiv. 11.

with thee to help, whether with many, or with those that have no power."

Sometimes God hath defeated great armies by plain and apparent miracles. Such was the drowning of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; and the stars fighting in their courses against Sisera; by which poetical expression I suppose is meant Sisera's being remarkably defeated by a visible hand from heaven: and such was the destruction of the proud King of Assyria's army by an angel, who slew a hundred and fourscore and five thousand of them in one night.

Sometimes God does this by more human ways; by striking mighty armies with a panic and unaccountable fear; and sometimes by putting extraordinary spirits and courage into the weaker side, so that a hundred shall chase a thousand, and a thousand shall put ten thousand to flight.

This made David so frequently to acknowledge the providence of God, especially in the affairs of war. "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host, neither is a mighty man delivered by much strength." Psal. xxxiii. 16. And again, "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me." Psal. xliv. 6. And Solomon confirms the same observation, "There is no wisdom (says he,) nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety (or, as some translations render it, victory) is of the Lord." Prov. xxi. 30, 31. Gideon, by a very odd stratagem of lamps and pitchers, defeated a very numerous army, only with three hundred men. Jonathan and his armour-bearer, by climbing up a rock, and coming suddenly on the back of the Philistines' camp, struck them with such

a terror as put their whole army to flight. King Asa, with a much inferior number, defeated that huge Æthiopian army which consisted of a million. And how was Xerxes' mighty army overthrown almost by a handful of Grecians? And, to come nearer to ourselves, how was that formidable fleet of the Spaniards, which they presumptuously called invincible, shattered and broken in pieces, chiefly by the winds and the sea? so many accidents are there, especially in war, whereby the Divine providence doth sometimes interpose, and give victory to the weaker side.

And this hath been so apparent in all ages, that even the heathen did always acknowledge, in the affairs of war, a special interposition of fortune, by which the wiser among them did understand the Divine providence. Plutarch, speaking of the Romans, says, that time and fortune, the very same with Solomon's time and chance here in the text, "did lay the foundation of their greatness;" by which he ascribes their success to a remarkable providence of God concurring with several happy opportunities.

And Livy, their great historian, hath this remarkable observation, that "in all human affairs, especially in matters of war, fortune hath a mighty stroke." And again, "Nowhere (says he,) is the event less answerable to expectation than in war; and therefore nothing is so slight and inconsiderable, which may not turn the scales in a great matter. And Cæsar himself, who was perhaps the most skilful and prosperous warrior that ever was, makes the same acknowledgment: "As in all other things, (says he,) so particularly in war, fortune hath a huge sway." And Plutarch observes, That there was no temple at Rome dedicated to Wisdom or Valour, but

a most magnificent and stately one to Fortune; signifying hereby, that they did ascribe their success infinitely more to the providence of God, than to their own courage and conduct. I proceed now, in the

Second place, to give some reason and account of this, why the providence of God doth sometimes thus interpose to hinder and defeat the most probable designs of men:—To bring men to an acknowledgment of his providence, and of their dependance upon him, and subordination to him; and that he is the great governor of the world, and "rules in the kingdoms of men;" and that "all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing to him," and the power of second causes inconsiderable: that "he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none may stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?"

God hath so ordered things, in the administration of the affairs of the world, as to encourage the use of means; and yet so, as to keep men in a continual dependance upon him for the efficacy and success of them: to encourage industry and prudence, God generally permits things to their natural course, and to fall out according to the power and probability of second causes.

But then, lest men should cast off religion, and "deny the God that is above;" lest they should "trust in their sword and their bow, and say, the Lord hath not done this;" lest men should look upon themselves as the creators and framers of their own fortune, and when they do but a little outstrip others in wisdom or power, in the skill and conduct of human affairs, they should grow proud and presumptuous, God is pleased sometimes more remarkably to interpose, "to hide pride from man," as the expression is in

Job; to check the haughtiness and insolence of men's spirits, and to keep them within the bounds of modesty and humility; to make us to know "that we are but men," and that the reins of the world are not in our hands, but that there is One above who sways and governs all things here below.

And indeed if we should suppose, in the first frame of things, which we call nature, an immutable order to be fixed, and all things to go on in a constant course, according to the power and force of second causes, without any interposition of Providence to stop, or alter that course upon any occasion: in this case, the foundation of a great part of religion, but especially of prayer to God, would be quite taken away. Upon this supposition it would be the vainest thing in the world to pray to God for the good success of our undertakings, or to acknowledge him as the author of it: for if God do only look on, and permit all things to proceed in a settled and established course; then, instead of praying to God, we ought to ply the means, and to make the best provision and preparation we can for the effecting of what we desire; and to rely upon that, without taking God at all into our counsel and consideration. For all application to God by prayer doth evidently suppose, that the providence of God does frequently interpose, to overrule events besides and beyond the natural and ordinary course of things, and to steer them to a quite different point, from that to which in human probability they seemed to tend.

So that it is every whit as necessary to religion to believe the providence of God, and that he governs the world, and does when he pleases interpose in the affairs of it, as that he made it at first. I come now, in the

Third and last place, to make some inferences suitable to the occasion of this day, from what hath been said upon this argument. And they shall be these:

First, From hence we may learn, not to account religion, and time spent in the service of God, and in prayer to him for his blessing upon our endeavours, to be any hinderance to our affairs. For after we have done all we can, the event is still in God's hand, and rests upon the disposal of his providence.

And did men firmly believe this, they would not neglect the duty of prayer, and behave themselves so carelessly, and unconcernedly, and irreverently in it, as we see too many do; they would not look upon every hour that is spent in devotion, as lost from their business.

If men would but take a view of what hath happened to them in the course of a long life, I believe most of us would see reason to acknowledge, that our prosperity and success in any kind hath depended more upon happy opportunities, upon undesigned and unexpected occurrences, than upon our own prudent forecast and conduct.

And if this were well considered by us, we should not methinks be so apt to leave God out of our counsels and undertakings, as if he were a mere name and cipher in the world. It is, I am sure, the advice of one that was much wiser and more experienced than any of us will pretend to be, I mean Solomon: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths: be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil." There is no principle that ought more firmly to be believed by us than this, that to live under a constant sense and awe

Prov. iii. 5, 6, 7.

of Almighty God, to depend upon his providence, and to seek his favour and blessing upon all our designs, being fearful to offend him, and careful to please him, is a much nearer and surer way to success, than our own best prudence and preparations.

And therefore, at such a time, more especially, when we are going to war, or engaged in it, we should break off our sins by repentance, and the sincere resolution of a better course: we should earnestly implore the blessing of God upon our undertakings; and not only take great care that our cause be just, but likewise that there be no wicked thing amongst us, to drive God out of our camp; no accursed thing, that may provoke him to deliver us into the hands of our enemies. It was a particular law given by God to the Jews, "When the host goeth forth against thine enemy, then keep thyself from every wicked thing;" then, that is, more especially at such a time.

Deut. xxiii 9.

And this is a necessary caution, not only to those who are personally engaged in the war, that by the favour of God they may have their heads covered in the day of battle; or if God shall suffer them to fall by the hand of the enemy, that having made their peace beforehand with him, they may not only have the comfort of a good cause, but of a good conscience, void of offence towards God and men.

But this caution likewise concerns those, who are interested in the success and event of the war; as we all are, not only in regard of our lives and estates, but of that which ought to be much dearer to us, our religion and the freedom of our consciences; which are now every whit as much at stake, as our civil interests and liberties. And therefore, as we tender any, or all of these; we should be

very careful to keep ourselves from every wicked thing; that they who fight for us, may not, for our sins and for our sakes, turn their backs in the day of battle, and fall by the sword of the enemy.

Secondly, From hence we may likewise learn, so to use the means as still to depend upon God; who can, as he pleases, bless the counsels and endeavours of men, or blast them and make them of none effect. For as God hath promised nothing but to a wise and diligent use of means, so all our prudence and industry, and most careful preparations, may miscarry, if he do not favour our design: for without him nothing is wise, nothing is strong, nothing is able to reach and attain its end.

We should indeed use the means as vigorously as if God did nothing; and when we have done so, we should depend upon God for the success of those means, as if we ourselves had done nothing, but did expect all from his favour and blessing: for when all is done, we are only safe under his protection, and sure of success from his blessing.

For, whatever vain and foolish men may say in their hearts, there is a God, that made the world, and administers the affairs of it with great wisdom and goodness: else how came any of us into being, or what do we here? Did we not most assuredly believe that there is a God, that governs the world and superintends human affairs; the first wish of a wise man would be, to steal out of being, if he could; and that the same chance of necessity that brought him into the world, would take the first opportunity to carry him out. For to be every moment liable to present, and great, and certain evils; and to have no security against the continuance of them, or the return of the same or worse evils; nor

to have any assurance of a better and more durable state of rest and happiness hereafter, is in truth so very melancholy a meditation, that I do not know any consideration in the world that is of force and power enough to support the mind of man under it: and were there not in the world a Being, that is wiser, and better, and more powerful than ourselves, and that keeps things from running into endless confusion and disorder; a Being that loves us, and takes care of us, and that will certainly consider and reward all the good that we do, and all the evil that we suffer upon his account; I do not see what reason any man could have to take any comfort and joy in being, or to wish the continuance of it for one moment.

Thirdly and lastly, The consideration of what hath been said upon this argument, should keep us from being too sanguine and confident of the most likely designs and undertakings; because these do not always answer the probability of second causes and means; and never less, than when we do with the greatest confidence rely upon them; when we promise most to ourselves from them, then are they most likely to deceive us: they are, as the prophet compares them, like a broken reed, which a man may walk with in his hand, while he lays no great stress upon it; but if he trust to it, and lean his whole weight on it, it will not only fail him, but even pierce him through.

And we cannot do a greater prejudice to our affairs, when they are in the most hopeful and likely condition to succeed and do well, than to shut God and his providence out of our counsels and consideration. When we pass God by, and take no notice of him, but will rely upon our own wisdom and

strength, we provoke him to leave us in the hands of our own counsel, and to let us see what weak and foolish creatures we are: and a man is never in greater danger of drowning, than when he clasps his arms closest about himself: besides that, God loves to resist the self-confident and presumptuous, and to "scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

And as in all our concernments we ought to have a great regard to God, the supreme disposer of all things, and earnestly to seek his favour and blessing upon all our undertakings, so more especially in the affairs of war; in which the providence of God is pleased many times in a very peculiar manner to interpose and interest itself. And there is great reason to think he does so: because all war is, as it were, an appeal to God, and a reference of those causes to the decision of his providence, which, through the pride, and injustice, and perverse passions of men, can receive no other determination.

And here God loves to shew himself, and in an eminent manner to take part with right and justice against those mighty oppressors of the earth, who, like an overflowing flood, would bear down all before them: in this case, the providence of God is sometimes pleased to give a remarkable check to great power and violence, and to one that vainly gives out himself not unequal to the whole world, by very weak and contemptible means; and, as the apostle elegantly expresseth it, "By the things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are:" and to say to him, as God once did to the proud King of Assyria, "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed; and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of

Is. xxxvii. 23. 26, 27, 28, 29. 32.

Israel. Hast thou not heard long ago, that I have done it; and of ancient times that I have formed it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded," &c. "But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me: because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears; therefore will I put my hook into thy nose, and my bridle into thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest——The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this."

But more especially, in vindication of his oppressed truth and religion, and in the great and signal deliverances of his church and people, God is wont to take the conduct of affairs into his own hands, and not to proceed by human rules and measures; he then bids second causes to stand by, that his own arm may be seen, and his salvation may appear: he raiseth the spirits of men above their natural pitch; "and giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength," as the prophet expresseth it.

Thus hath the providence of God very visibly appeared in our late deliverance; in such a manner, as I know not whether he ever did for any other nation, except the people of Israel, when he delivered them from the house of bondage by so mighty a hand and so outstretched an arm: and yet too many among us, I speak it this day to our shame, do not seem to have the least sense of this great deliverance, or of the hand of God which was so visible in it; but, like the children of Israel when they were brought out of Egypt, we are all full of murmurings

and discontent against God, the author, and his servant, the happy instrument under God of this our deliverance. What the prophet says of that people may I fear be too justly applied to us: "Let favour be shewn to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord: Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed:" and I hope I may add that which follows in the next verse, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us; for thou also hast wrought all our works for us." What God hath already done for our deliverance is, I hope, an earnest that he will carry it on to a perfect peace and settlement; and this, notwithstanding our high provocations and horrible ingratitude to the God of our life, and of our salvation. Isa. xxvi. 10, 11.

And whenever the providence of God thinks fit thus to interpose in human affairs, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong:" for which reason their Majesties, in their great piety and wisdom, and from a just sense of the providence of Almighty God, which rules in the kingdoms of men, have thought fit to set apart this day for solemn repentance and humiliation: that the many and heinous sins, which we in this nation have been, and still are guilty of, and which are of all other our greatest and most dangerous enemies, may not separate between God and us, and hinder good things from us, and cover us with confusion in the day of our danger and distress: and likewise, earnestly to implore the favour and blessings of Almighty God upon their Majesties' forces and preparations by sea and land: and, more particularly, for the preserva-

tion of his Majesty's sacred person, upon whom so much depends, and who is contented again to hazard himself to save us.

To conclude: There is no such way to engage the providence of God for us, as by real repentance and reformation; and by doing all we can, in our several places, from the highest to the lowest, by the provision of wise and effectual laws for the discountenancing and suppressing of profaneness and vice, and by the careful and due execution of them, and by the more kindly and powerful influence of a good example, to retrieve the ancient piety and virtue of the nation: for without this, whatever we may think of the firmness of our present settlement, we cannot long be upon good terms with Almighty God, upon whose favour depends the prosperity and stability of the present and future times.

I have but one thing more to mind you of; and that is, to stir up your charity towards the poor; which is likewise a great part of the duty of this day, and which ought always to accompany our prayers and fastings; thy prayers and thine alms, saith the angel to Cornelius, are come up before God: and therefore if we desire that our prayers should reach heaven, and receive a gracious answer from God, we must send up our alms along with them.

And, instead of all other arguments to this purpose, I shall only recite to you the plain and persuasive words of God himself, in which he declares what kind of fast is acceptable to him: "Is it such a fast as I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the

Isa. lviii. 5, 6, &c.

bands of wickedness, and to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily; thy righteousness (or thine alms,) shall go before thee; and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward: then shalt thou call, and I will answer thee; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am."

Now to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain: to God, even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth: unto Him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

And the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

DEDICATION

TO THE FOLLOWING SERMON.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR THOMAS PILKINGTON,

Lord Mayor of the City of London:

AND THE COURT OF ALDERMEN.

My Lord,

In obedience to your commands, I have published this sermon, lately preached before you, and do now humbly present you with it; heartily wishing it may have that good effect for the reformation of our lives, and reconciliation of our unhappy differences, which was sincerely intended by,

My Lord,

Your most faithful and humble servant,

John Tillotson.

SERMON XXXVII.

[A Fast Sermon preached before the Lord Mayor, &c. on Wednesday, June 18, 1690.]

THE WAY TO PREVENT THE RUIN OF A SINFUL PEOPLE.

Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.—JEREMIAH vi. 8.

THESE words are a merciful warning from God to the people of Israel by the prophet Jeremiah, the last prophet that God sent to them before their captivity in Babylon.

The time of his prophecy was of a long continuance, above the space of forty years; viz. from the thirteenth year of King Josiah, to the eleventh year of King Zedekiah, the year in which Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

This I observe, to shew the great patience of God to a sinful nation. And this is much the same space of time that God gave warning by our blessed Saviour and his apostles to the same people of the Jews concerning their final destruction. For it was about forty years after the prediction of our Saviour concerning it, just before his death, that the terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation was executed upon them by the Romans, or rather chiefly by themselves, as I shall presently shew. Of which dreadful desolation, the first taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and their captivity into Babylon,

was a kind of type and forerunner; for, as Josephus observes, the taking of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian did happen in the very same month, and on the very same day of the month in which Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar—viz. upon our 10th of August.

And it is not unworthy of our observation, that the time of God's warning is wont to hold some sort of proportion with the extent of his judgments. Before the universal deluge, which destroyed the whole world, Noah and his family only excepted, God gave a much longer warning by the preaching of Noah, for the space of a hundred and twenty years. Before the destruction of a particular nation, if we may judge by God's dealing with the Jews, his time of warning is forty years. And before the destruction of a particular city, if we may conclude any thing from the single example of Nineveh, the time of God's warning is yet much shorter—the space of forty days.

And now, to what end doth God exercise so much patience, and threaten so long beforehand, but that, by the terror of his threatenings, men may be brought to repentance, and by repentance may prevent the execution of them? For all the while that God by his prophet threatens ruin and destruction to the people of Israel, he earnestly invites and urges them to repentance, that by this means they might escape the ruin that was denounced against them: this being a condition perpetually implied in the denunciation of public judgments, that if a people repent of the evil of their doings, God also will repent of the evil which he said he would do unto them, as he expressly declares, chap. xviii. ver. 7, 8: "At what instant I speak concerning a nation, and con-

cerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil which I thought to do unto them." And here in the text, after God had threatened destruction to Jerusalem, because of the overflowing of all manner of wickedness and oppression in the midst of her, he gives her a merciful warning to prevent this ruin and desolation by repentance: (ver. 6, 7.) "Thus hath the Lord of hosts said, Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is a city to be visited, she is wholly oppression in the midst of her. As a fountain casteth out water, so she casteth out her wickedness. Before me continually is grief and wounds." And yet when he had pronounced this fearful sentence upon her, he tells her, that all this misery and desolation might yet be prevented, if they would but hearken to the counsel of God, and be instructed by him concerning the things of their peace: for so it follows in the next words; "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited." "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem;" that is, do but now at last take that counsel and warning, which hath so often and so long been tendered to thee by my servant the prophet, who hath now, for the space of forty years continually, and that with great earnestness and importunity, been warning thee of this danger, and calling thee to repentance and a better mind.

"Lest my soul depart from thee." In the Hebrew it is, "Lest my soul be loosened and disjointed from thee," as it is in the margin of your Bibles; hereby signifying, in the most emphatical manner, the wonderful affection and kindness which God had for his

people, and how strongly his soul was linked to them, and how loath he was to withdraw his love from them; it was like the tearing off of a limb, or the plucking of a joint in sunder; so unwilling is God to come to extremity; so hardly is he brought to resolve upon the ruin even of a sinful nation: how much rather would he, that they would be instructed, and receive correction, and hearken to the things of their peace? but if they will not be persuaded, if no warning will work upon them, his Spirit will not always strive with them; but his soul will at last, though with great unwillingness and reluctancy, depart from them.

And then, no intercession will prevail for them; as he threatens by the same prophet: (chap. xv. 1.) "Then said the Lord unto me, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth:" away with them into captivity, for they have lost my heart, and no intercession of others for them, nothing but their own repentance, can recover it.

And when his soul is once departed from a people, and his heart turned against them, then all sorts of evils and calamities will be let loose upon them; as we may read in the next verse of that chapter:

Jer. xv. 2. "And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then shalt thou tell them, Thus saith the Lord, Such as are for death to death, and such as are for the sword to the sword, and such as are for the famine to the famine, and such as are for the captivity to the captivity." For then God will be weary of repenting, as he tells them: (ver. 6.) "Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward;

therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and deliver thee; I am weary of repenting." By our obstinate impenitency we harden the heart of God against us, and make him weary of repenting. And when his soul is thus departed from a people, nothing remains but a fearful expectation of ruin. "Woe unto them, (saith God by the prophet) when I depart from them." Therefore, "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited." Hos. ix. 12.

Having given this account of the words, I shall observe from them three things, well worth our consideration.

First, The infinite goodness and patience of God towards a sinful people, and his great unwillingness to bring ruin and destruction upon them; "Lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited." How loath is he that things should come to this extremity? he is not, without great difficulty, and some kind of violence, as it were, offered to himself, brought to this severe resolution; his soul is, as it were, rent and disjointed from them.

Secondly, You see here what is the only proper and effectual means to prevent the misery and ruin of a sinful people. If they will be instructed, and take warning by the threatenings of God, and will become wiser and better, then his soul will not depart from them, he will not bring upon them the desolation which he hath threatened.

Thirdly, You have here intimated the miserable case and condition of a people, when God takes off his affection from them, and gives over all further care and concernment for them. Woe unto them, when his soul departs from them! For when God

once leaves them, then all sorts of evil and calamities will break in upon them.

I shall speak as briefly as I can to these three observations from the text.

I. First, I observe the infinite patience and goodness of God towards a sinful people, and his great unwillingness to bring ruin and destruction upon them; "Lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited." How loath is God that things should come to this? he is very patient to particular persons, notwithstanding their great and innumerable provocations. God is strong and patient, though men provoke him every day. And much greater is his patience to whole nations and great communities of men.

How great was it to the old world, "when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah," for the space of a hundred and twenty years, and did not expire till "he saw that the wickedness of man was grown great upon the earth, and that all flesh had corrupted its way?" not till it was necessary to drown the world to cleanse it, and to destroy mankind to reform it, by beginning a new world upon the only righteous family that was left of all the last generation of the old? For so God testifies concerning Noah, when he commanded him to enter into the ark, saying, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee (that is, thee only) have I seen righteous before me in this generation."

Gen. vii. 1.

The patience of God was great likewise to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them. For when "the cry of their sins had reached heaven," and called loud for vengeance to be poured down upon them, to express the wonderful patience of God

toward such grievous sinners, though nothing is hid from his sight and knowledge, yet he is represented as coming down from heaven to earth, on purpose to inquire into the truth of things, and "whether they were altogether according to the cry that was come up to him;" and when he found things as bad as was possible, yet then was he willing to have come almost to the lowest terms imaginable, that if there had been but ten righteous persons in those wicked cities, he would not have destroyed them for the ten's sake.

Nay, he seems to come to lower terms yet, with the city of Jerusalem: (Jer. v. 1.) "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, and seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it."

What can be imagined more slow, and mild, and merciful, than the proceedings of the Divine justice against a sinful people? God is represented in Scripture, as taking a long time to make ready his bow, and to whet his glittering sword, before his hand takes hold of vengeance; as if the instruments of his wrath lay by him blunt and rusty, and unready for use. Many a time he threatens, and many a time lifts up his hand, before he gives the fatal blow. And how glad is he, when any good man will step in and interpose to stay his hand! As we read, (Psal. cvi. 23.) "Therefore he said (speaking of the people of Israel) that he would destroy them, had not Moses his servant stood in the breach to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them." And how kindly doth God take it of Phinehas, as a most acceptable piece of service done to him, and which he hardly knew how sufficiently to reward, that he was a means of putting a stop to his anger against the

people of Israel: insomuch, that the Psalmist tells us, that "it was accounted to him for righteousness, to all generations, for evermore." I will recite the whole passage at large, because it is remarkable. When the people of Israel were seduced into idolatry and whoredom, by the daughters of Moab, Phinehas in great zeal stood up, and executed judgment upon Zimri and Cosbi in the very act: by which means, the plague, which was broken out upon the congregation of Israel, was presently stayed. Hear what God says to Moses concerning this act of Phinehas: "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned away my wrath from the children of Israel, whilst he was zealous for my sake, that I consumed them not. Wherefore say, Behold I give unto him my covenant of peace, and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel." That which God takes so kindly at his hands, next to his zeal for him, is, that he pacified God's wrath towards the children of Israel.

And thus did God, from time to time, deal with the people of Israel, that great example of the Old Testament of the merciful methods of the Divine providence towards a sinful nation: and an example, (as St. Paul tells us,) purposely "recorded for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

1 Cor. x. 11.

Let us therefore consider a little the astonishing patience of God towards that perverse people. After all the signs and wonders which he had wrought in their deliverance out of Egypt, and for their support in the wilderness; and notwithstanding their

gross and stupid infidelity, and horrible ingratitude to God their Saviour, and all their rebellious murmurings and discontents, yet he suffered their manners for the space of forty years.

And when they were at last peaceably settled in the promised land, notwithstanding their frequent relapses into idolatry, with what patience did God expect their repentance, and the result of all the merciful messages and warnings given them, from time to time, by his prophets, as one that earnestly desired it, and even longed for it? "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" that is, how long wilt thou delude thyself with vain hopes of escaping the judgments of God, by any other way than by repentance? And again, "O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" And chap. viii. ver. 6. says God there, "I hearkened and I heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?" Where God is represented, after the manner of men, waiting with great patience, as one that would have been glad to have heard any penitent word drop from them, to have seen any sign of their repentance, and return to a better mind.

Jer. iv. 14.

Jer. xiii. 27.

And when they made some shews of repentance, and had some fits of good resolution, that did presently vanish and come to nothing, how passionately does God complain of their fickleness and inconstancy? "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

And at last, when nothing would do, with what

difficulty and reluctance does God deliver them up into the hands of their enemies? "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Judah? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together; I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not destroy Ephraim." What a conflict is here! what tenderness and yearning of his bowels towards them! He cannot find in his heart to give them up, till he is forced to it by the last necessity.

Hos. xi. 8, 9.

And when the nation of the Jews, after their return from the captivity of Babylon, had, in the course of several ages, greatly corrupted themselves, and filled up the measure of their sins, by "crucifying the Lord of life and glory," yet how slow was the patience of God in bringing that fatal and final destruction upon them? Not till after the most merciful warnings given to them, by the apostles of our Lord and Saviour—not till after the most obstinate impenitency of forty years, under the most powerful means of repentance that any people in the world ever enjoyed. I proceed to the

II. Second observation from the text; namely, What is the only proper and effectual means to prevent the ruin of a sinful people? and that is, if they will be instructed, and take warning by the threatenings of God, to become wiser and better, then his soul will not depart from them, and he will not bring upon them the desolation threatened. "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, and I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited;" intimating, or rather plainly declaring to us, that if we will receive instruction and take warning, the evil threatened shall not come. For what other reason can

there be, why God should threaten so long before he strikes, and so earnestly press men to repentance, but that he might have the opportunity to spare them, and to shew mercy to them?

And, indeed, as I observed before, all the denunciations and threatenings of God to a sinful nation do carry this tacit condition in them, that if that nation turn from their evil ways, God will repent of the evil which he thought to do unto them. For God never passeth so irrevocable a sentence upon a nation, as to exclude the case of repentance: nay, on the contrary, he gives all imaginable encouragement to it, and is always ready to meet it, with a pardon in his hand. "How often would I have gathered thee (says our merciful Lord when he wept over Jerusalem), as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not: therefore your house is left unto you desolate."

God is very merciful to particular persons upon their repentance. When the prodigal son, in the parable, after all his riot and lewdness, came to himself and resolved to return home, his father, seeing him yet afar off coming towards him, came out to meet him, and had compassion on him and kissed him. And can any of us be so obstinate and hard-hearted, as not presently to resolve to repent and return, and to meet the compassions of such a Father? who, after we have offended him to the uttermost, is upon the first discovery of our repentance ready to be as kind to us, as he could possibly have been if we had never offended him.

And much more is God ready to receive a nation upon their sincere repentance; when his judgments must needs make great havoc, and so many are like to suffer under them. This consideration God

urgeth and pleads with his froward prophet, in behalf of the great city of Nineveh: "And shall not I spare that great city of Nineveh, wherein are more than six score thousand persons who cannot discern their right hand from their left?" that is, so many innocent children, by which we may judge of the vast number of the rest of the inhabitants. For this is a great consideration with God, in his sending of public calamities—the multitude of the sufferers; and that not only the guilty, but the innocent also, without a special and miraculous providence, must be involved in a common calamity.

Jonah iv. 11.

Sometimes God respites his judgment upon the mere external humiliation of a people, and some formal testimonies and expressions of their repentance. When the people of Israel sought God and inquired early after him, though they did but flatter him with their mouth, and their heart was not right with him, yet the Psalmist tells us, "that being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not;" that is, he forgave them so far as to respite their ruin.

Psal. lxxviii.

And much more will a sincere and effectual repentance stay God's hand, and infallibly turn him from the fierceness of his anger: insomuch, that after he had fixed and determined the very day for the destruction of Nineveh, and had engaged the credit of his prophet in it, yet, as soon as he saw their works, and that they turned from their evil ways, how glad was he to see it? he presently repented of the evil which he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not. In this case God does not stand upon the reputation of his prophet, by whom he had sent so peremptory a message to them; but his mercy breaks through all considerations, and re-

joiceth against judgment: for he cannot find in his heart to ruin those, who by the terror of his judgments will be brought to repentance.

And this surely is a mighty motive and encouragement to repentance, to be assured that we shall find mercy; and that when our ruin is even decreed, and all the instruments of God's wrath are fixed and ready for execution, and his hand is just taking hold of vengeance, yet even then a sincere repentance will mitigate his hottest displeasure, and turn away his wrath. And if we will not come in upon these terms, we extort the judgments of God from him, and force him to depart from us, and with violent hands we pull down vengeance upon our own heads.

III. Thirdly and lastly, The text intimates to us the miserable case and condition of a people, when God takes off his heart and affection from them, when he gives over all further care and concernment for them, and abandons them to their own wickedness and folly, and to the miserable effects and consequences thereof: "Woe unto them when his soul departs from them!" for then all sorts of evils and calamities will rush in, and wrath will come upon them to the uttermost: as was threatened to the Jews a little before their final destruction, and executed upon them in the most terrible and amazing manner that ever was from the foundation of the world. These, as our blessed Saviour expresses it, were days of vengeance indeed, that all things which were written, that is, foretold by Moses and the prophets concerning the fearful end of this perverse and stiff-necked people, might be fulfilled.

And because my text speaks to Jerusalem, "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not in-

habited;" though this was spoken to Jerusalem before her captivity into Babylon, yet, because this first captivity was but a faint type of her last and final desolation by the Romans, when God's soul was indeed departed from her, and Judea was left desolate, "a land not inhabited:" I shall therefore briefly represent to you the full effect of this threatening in her last final destruction, when God's soul was, as it were, perfectly loosened and disjointed from her: that you may see what the fierceness and power of God's anger is when he departs from them, and wrath comes upon them to the uttermost, because they would not be instructed and know the time of their visitation.

Thus it was with the Jews, about forty years after the passion of our Lord, whom with wicked hands they had crucified and slain: then was God's soul departed from them: then darkness and desolation came upon them; and they were in a far worse condition than a country would be that is forsaken of the sun, and left condemned to a perpetual night, in which darkness and disorder, faction and fury do reign and rage; together with all the fatal consequences of zeal and strife, which St. James tells us, are confusion and every evil work. For when God is once gone, all the good and happiness of mankind departs together with him: then men fall foul upon one another, divide into parties and factions, and execute the vengeance of God upon themselves with their own hands.

Thus it happened to the Jewish nation, when the measure of their iniquity was full, and their final ruin was approaching. And that we may know their fate, and be instructed by it, God provided and preserved a faithful historian on purpose, who was an

eye witness of all that befel them ; I mean Josephus, who was personally engaged, and was a considerable commander in the wars of the Jews with the Romans, before the siege of Jerusalem ; and during the siege was present in the Roman camp, and being a Jew himself, hath transmitted these things to posterity in a most exact and admirable history : such a history, as no man, that hath the heart and bowels of a man, can read without the greatest pity and astonishment.

In the preface of that lamentable history he tells us, that all the misfortunes and calamities which the world from the beginning of it had seen, compared with this last calamity of the Jewish nation, were but slight and inconsiderable. He tells us, likewise, that their civil dissensions were the next and immediate cause of their confusion and ruin.

And this more than once: for when Pompey, about sixty years before our Saviour's birth, sat down before Jerusalem, he tell us, that the factions and divisions which they had among themselves were the cause of the taking the city and temple at that time. And when they rebelled afterwards, that the heads of their factions provoked the Romans, and brought them unwillingly upon them, and at last forced the best-natured prince in the world, Titus Vespasian, to that severity which he most earnestly desired by all means to have prevented. And he further tells us, that even before the siege of Jerusalem, the cities of Judea had all of them civil discords among themselves, and that in every city one part of the Jews fought against another.

Lib. i. c. 3.

Lib. iv. c. 5.

And when Jerusalem began to be besieged, what a miserable condition was it in, by the cruelty of the zealots under the command of John the son of

Giorah? And presently after another faction arose under Simon, who entered into the city with a fresh force, and assaulted the zealots in the temple: so that most miserable havoc was made between them. And then a third faction started up under Eleazar, as bad as either of the others: so that infinite almost were the numbers of the people within the city, that were barbarously slain by these seditions.

Lib. vii. c. 1.

And what an infatuation was this! when the enemy was at the gates and ready to break in upon them, to employ their whole strength and force against one another: when the same courage and fury, which they spent so freely upon themselves, had it been turned with the like desperateness and obstinacy upon the Romans, might have endangered the whole force of the Roman empire! Once or twice indeed they seemed to lay aside their enmity for a little while, and to unite in the common defence; but as soon as the danger of a present assault was over, they relapsed into their former state of intestine enmity and dissension, as if that had been their main business, and the preservation of their city against the Romans only a work by the bye, and not much to be regarded.

And to add to all their other miseries, they were so blinded by their own rage and madness, that they wilfully brought upon themselves an extreme famine. For, as the historian tells us, they themselves set on fire vast stores of corn and other necessaries, sufficient to have served them for many years; and by this means the city was much sooner reduced, even by a famine of their own making, and which could not have been brought upon them but by themselves.

This famine, besides all the other miseries and

cruelties which it occasioned within the city, did force great numbers of them to steal out by night into the Roman camp; where they met with as cruel but a speedier death. For Titus, in hope to reduce them the sooner by terror, ordered all those that came out of the city to be crucified before the walls. Which order was so severely executed, that for several days, five hundred a day were crucified, till there was neither room left to place crosses in, nor wood whereof to make them: so that they, who once cried out so vehemently against our Saviour, "Crucify him, crucify him," had enough of it at last, and by the just and most remarkable judgment of God, were paid home in their own kind.

Behold the sad fate of a sinful people, when God is departed from them! then all evils overtook them at once. For as their misery increased, so did their impiety to that degree, that the historian tells us, "They scorned and mocked at all divine and holy things, and derided the oracles of the prophets, esteeming them no better than fables;" and, in a word, were carried to that extremity of wickedness, as not only to profane their temple in the highest manner, and to break the laws of their own religion, but even to violate the laws of nature and humanity in the grossest instances; which made their historian to give that dismal character of them, "That as he thought no city ever suffered such things, so no nation from the beginning of the world, did ever so abound in all manner of wickedness and impiety:" a certain sign that God's soul was departed from them.

Lib. v. c. 2.

Lib. vi. c. 11.

And the same historian afterwards, upon consideration of the lamentable state into which their seditions had brought them, breaks out into this doleful

Lib. vii. c. 1. lamentation over them, "O miserable city! what didst thou suffer from the Romans, though at last they set thee on fire to purge thee from thy sins, that is to be compared with those miseries which thou hast brought upon thyself?"

To such a dismal state did things come at last, that, as the same historian relates, "Many of the Jews prayed for the good success of their enemies, to deliver them from their civil dissensions, the calamity whereof was so great, that their final destruction by the Romans did rather put an end to their misery than increase it.

———En! quo discordia Cives
Perduxit miseros———

To conclude this sad story. It was the Jews themselves that by their own folly and dissensions forced the Romans to this sorrowful victory over them; for in truth all the remorse and pity was on the enemies' side. The Romans were little more than spectators in this cruel tragedy, the Jews acted it upon themselves: and they only who were arrived at that prodigious height of impiety and wickedness, were fit to be the executioners of this vengeance of God upon one another: as if the prophet had

Jer. ii. 9. foretold this, when he says, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee."

When impiety and wickedness are at their highest pitch in a nation, then they themselves are the only proper instruments to punish one another. The Romans were by far too good and gentle to inflict a suffering upon the Jews that was equal to the evil of their doings: none but their own barbarous selves, who were sunk down into the very lowest degeneracy of human nature, were capable of so

much cruelty and inhumanity as was requisite to execute the judgment of God upon them to that degree which their sins had deserved.

You see, my brethren, by what hath been said upon this argument, what were the faults, and what the fate of the Jewish nation. Now these things, as the apostle expressly tells us, were written for our admonition, and to the intent that we upon whom the ends of the world are come, might be instructed by them: we, I say, who next to the Jewish nation seem to be a people highly favoured by God above all the nations of the earth. We resemble them very much in their many and wonderful deliverances, and a great deal too much in their faults and follies.

But as I intend it not, so God forbid that there should be any just ground for a full and exact parallel between us; yet this I must say, that nothing ever came nearer to them than we do in several respects—in our fickleness and inconstancy, in our murmurings and discontents; for we are never pleased with what God does, neither when he brings us into danger, nor when he delivers us out of it. We resemble them likewise in our horrible profaneness and infidelity, and in our impiety and wickedness of several kinds: in our monstrous ingratitude, and most unworthy returns to the God of our salvation: and, lastly, in our factions and divisions, which were the fatal sign of God's being departed from the Jews, and the immediate cause and means of those dismal calamities which wrought their final ruin. And how can we choose but dread lest their fate should overtake us, the example of whose faults and follies we do in so many things so nearly resemble?

That this may not, nor any thing like it, be our fate, let us apply ourselves to the great duties of

this day: a serious and deep repentance and humiliation of ourselves before Almighty God for the many and heinous sins which we in this nation have been, and still are guilty of, against his Divine majesty; by our profaneness and impiety, by our lewdness and luxury, by our oppression and injustice, by our implacable malice and hatred one towards another, and by our senseless divisions and animosities one against another, without cause and without end: by our neglect of God's worship and profanation of his holy day, and by our dreadful abuse of God's great and glorious name, in those horrid oaths and curses and imprecations, which are heard almost day and night in the streets of this great city.

For these and all other our innumerable provocations of the patience and goodness and long-suffering of God towards us, let us sadly repent ourselves this day, "and turn unto the Lord with all our hearts, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend our hearts and not our garments, and turn unto the Lord our God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil: and who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned: take away all iniquity and receive us graciously."

And let us earnestly beg of him, that he would be pleased to prevent those terrible judgments and calamities which hang over us, and which our sins have so justly deserved should fall upon us: and that he would perfect that wonderful deliverance which he hath begun for us, and establish the thing which he hath wrought: that he would bless them whom he hath set in authority over us; and particu-

larly that he would preserve the person of the king in his present expedition, and crown him with victory and good success.

And to our repentance and prayers let us add our liberal alms, and according to the counsel given by the prophet to Nebuchadnezzar, "Let us break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if so be it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity."

We are yet, blessed be God, in the full enjoyment of peace and quiet at home, and of our religion and civil liberties. God hath given us two excellent princes setting on the throne together, and both of the same religion with the main body of the nation; and as bright examples of piety and goodness as England ever saw; and who do by all ways and means study and seek the good of the people committed to their charge.

So that if we did but know our own happiness, and how to value it, we might be the happiest people this day under heaven: and yet for all this, we are very far from being happy; because we are neither contented, nor united; and though we have all the materials of happiness about us, and within our reach, yet have we not the skill and wisdom to put them together.

Miserable people! that may be happy and will not; whom neither so fresh a deliverance from so great a danger as was just ready to have swallowed us up, nor the fear and apprehension of falling again into the like confusion, can be a warning to us from returning again into the same folly: for those odious and unhappy names of difference which, some years ago, sprang up among us, the devil knows how, did seem, whilst a common danger threatened

us, to be quite dead and buried: but no sooner was the danger over, but, by a kind of miraculous infatuation, behold a sudden resurrection of them, with greater heats and animosities, if possible, than before: just as it was with the Jews in the siege of Jerusalem; when the Romans had made a wide breach, and the city was furiously assaulted, the factions then gave truce to one another, and ran in to the common defence; but as soon as ever the danger was a little over, they fell on afresh, and prosecuted their main design of destroying one another.

And now that the danger is a little over with us also, how like a fate upon us does it look, that we are so soon altered from our wiser and better temper? Did we well and wisely before our late happy Revolution, when we united for our common defence against a common danger, and did let those unlucky names of distinction fall, so that they seemed to be quite extinguished? And can it be now wise to revive them, and to take them up again, when the same danger, in some degree, and from the same implacable enemies, still hovers over us? No, surely, it would not be wise, if the danger were quite past and over; but when it still remains and threatens us, what greater folly and infatuation can there be than still to divide and quarrel among ourselves? Will nothing but sad and bitter experience be an admonition to us? Will nothing but the last necessity and extremity of things bring us to ourselves and teach us wisdom?

Methinks we should all now be glad to be at rest, after the tedious troubles and distractions, the fruitless quarrels and divisions of fifty years. So long I remember; and in all that space how very few

years passed over us without some great calamity and dismal event! So that by this time one would think we should all be sick of our own follies, and so tired with our unprofitable feuds and dissensions, as to make both sides look about them, to see if any body will take pity on us, and to step in to part our quarrels.

And now I begin to be sensible, that I have engaged in a tender point indeed, and do feel myself standing upon a very slippery place. For who is fit to interpose in such hot and fierce differences? Who can do it without danger, or with any hopes of success? And yet for "Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep silence:" of so great consequence is it to the peace and happiness of this church and nation, that these names and distinctions of parties should be laid down and abolished for ever.

In order whereunto I take it for granted, and lay it for a principle, that he who hopes to persuade both sides must provoke neither: and therefore, I will not so much as inquire where the fault lies. It is in these civil differences as in family quarrels, between man and wife; if any man ask on which side lies the fault? one may almost safely answer at a venture, on both sides. It must indeed begin on one, but if it be not presently healed and made up, the other party is always so civil as to run in and take a share of the fault, that all the blame may not lie wholly on one side.

And now, my brethren, let me for once persuade and prevail with you for your good: let me be so happy as to say something that may sink into your hearts, and incline your minds to peace and good agreement with one another. "Have salt in your-

selves, (says our blessed Saviour, the great peace-maker) and peace one with another." By salt is meant grace and spiritual wisdom, and if that do but rule and sway in our hearts, we shall then endeavour, if it be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men. If we have salt in ourselves, that is, if we be wise, we will then certainly have peace one with another.

And if we were but once come to this healing temper, in this divided and distracted nation, we should not then need to fear all the power of the enemy. And this our enemies know full well: and therefore their chief policy and wisdom is, and ever hath been, to divide us; and it will be our own great folly and weakness if we suffer ourselves to be divided: for who that is wise will take counsel and advice from an enemy? But if we could agree and hold together, then our Jerusalem would be as a city that is compact together, strong and impregnable.

Let us then "be instructed, and know, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes." Ps. cxxii. And let us all earnestly endeavour, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "They shall prosper that love her," says the Psalmist; and they do not love her that do not seek her peace, and endeavour by all means to procure it: "That peace may be within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces:" the one cannot be without the other: without peace there can be no prosperity. And to go on with the words of the Psalmist, let every one of us say, yea let us all with one heart and voice say, "For our brethren and companions' sake," for the sake of our protestant brethren all the world over, let us say, "Peace be within thee!" For the house of the Lord

our God, for the sake of our holy religion, and of that excellent church whereof we all are, or ought to be members, let every one of us say, "I will seek thy good."

And what greater good can we do to the best religion, how can we better serve the interest of it in all parts of the world, than by being at peace and unity amongst ourselves, here in England? upon whom the eyes of all the protestants abroad are fixed, as the glory of the Reformation, and the great bulwark and support of it.

That so, under the providence of Almighty God, and the conduct of two such excellent princes as he hath now blessed us withal—the one so brave and valiant, and both of them so wise, so good, so religious—we may at last arrive at a firm establishment, and become like Mount Zion that cannot be moved, the perfection of beauty and strength, and the admiration and joy of the whole earth; which God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, thanksgiving and praise, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXVIII.

[Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, February 27, 1690-1.]

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE TOWARDS GOD AND MEN.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.—ACTS xxiv. 16.

THESE words are part of the defence which St. Paul made for himself before Felix the Roman governor.

In which he first of all vindicates himself from the charge of sedition: (verse 12.) "They neither found me in the temple, disputing with any man; neither raising up the people; neither in the synagogue, nor in the city;" that is, they could not charge him with making any disturbance either in church or state.

After this, he makes a free and open profession of his religion: (verse 14.) "But this I confess, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets." Here he declares the Scriptures to be the rule of his faith, in opposition to the oral tradition of the pharisees.

More particularly he asserts the doctrine of the resurrection, which was a principal article both of the Jewish and the Christian religion: (verse 15.) "And I have hope also toward God, that there

shall be a resurrection, both of the just and the unjust."

And having made this declaration of his faith, he gives an account of his life in the words of the text: (verse 16.) "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men."

Herein, ἐν τούτῳ, that is, in this work, do I employ myself; or, as others render it, in the mean time, whilst I am in this world; or, as others, I think most probably, for this cause and reason, ἐν τούτῳ, for διὰ τοῦτο, for this reason, because I believe a resurrection, therefore have I a conscientious care of my life, and all the actions of it.

The discourse I intend to make upon these words, shall be comprised in these following particulars.

I. Here is the extent of a good man's pious practice, to have "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men."

II. Here is his constancy and perseverance in this course; "to have always a conscience void of offence."

III. Here is his earnest care and endeavour to this purpose, "I exercise myself."

IV. Here is the principle and immediate guide of his actions, which St. Paul here tells us was his conscience.

V. I shall lay down some rules and directions for the keeping of a good conscience.

VI. Here is the great motive and encouragement to this, which St. Paul tells us was the belief of a resurrection, and of a future state of rewards and punishments consequent upon it—For this cause, because I hope for a resurrection both of the just and unjust, "I exercise myself to have always a con-

science void of offence, toward God and toward men." I shall speak but briefly to the three first of these particulars, that I may be larger in the rest.

I. Here is the extent of a good man's pious practice. It hath regard to the whole compass of his duty, as it respects God and man. "I exercise myself (says St. Paul,) to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." And this distribution of our duty, under these two general heads, is very frequent in Scripture. The decalogue refers our duty to these two heads: and, accordingly, our Saviour comprehends the whole duty of man in these two great commandments—the love of God, and of our neighbour: (Matth. xxii. 38.) "Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets;" that is, all the moral precepts, which are dispersed up and down in the law and the prophets, may be referred to these two general heads.

II. Here is his constancy and perseverance in this course. St. Paul says, that he exercised himself "to have always a conscience void of offence;" διαπαντὸς, continually, at all times, in the whole course of his life. We must not only make conscience of our ways by fits and starts, but in the general course and tenor of our lives and actions, without any balks and intermissions.

There are some that will refrain from grosser sins, and be very strict at some seasons; as during the time of a solemn repentance, and for some days before they receive the sacrament; and perhaps for a little while after it: and when these devout seasons are over, they let themselves loose again to their former lewd and vicious course: but religion should be a constant frame and temper of mind, discovering itself in the habitual course of our lives and actions.

III. Here is likewise a very earnest care and endeavour to this purpose. "Herein do I exercise myself," says St. Paul. The word ἀσκῶ, which is here rendered exercise, is a word of a very intense signification, and does denote that St. Paul applied himself to this business with all his care and might, and that he made it his earnest study and endeavour: and so we must; we must take great care to understand our duty, and to be rightly informed concerning good and evil, that we may not mistake the nature of things, and call good evil, and evil good: we must apply our minds in good earnest to be thoroughly instructed in all the parts of our duty, that so we may not be at a loss what to do when we are called to the practice of it. And when we know our duty, we must be true and honest to ourselves, and very careful and conscientious in the discharge and performance of it. I proceed, in the

IV. Fourth place to consider the principle and immediate guide of our actions, which St. Paul here tells us was his conscience; "I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence:" by which he does not only mean a resolution to follow the dictate and direction of his conscience, but likewise a due care to inform his conscience aright, that he might not in any thing transgress the law of God, and his duty.

Conscience is the great principle of moral actions, and our guide in matter of sin and duty. It is not the law and rule of our actions; that the law of God only is; but it is our immediate guide and director, telling us what is the law of God and our duty.

But because conscience is a word of a very large and various signification, I shall endeavour very briefly to give you the true notion of it. Now in

common speech concerning conscience, every man is represented as having a kind of court and tribunal in his own breast, where he tries himself and all his actions: and conscience, under one notion or other, sustains all parts in this trial; the court is called the court of a man's conscience, and the bar at which the sinner stands impleaded, is called the bar of conscience: conscience is also the accuser; and it is the record and register of our crimes, in which the memory of them is preserved: and it is the witness which gives testimony for or against us: hence are those expressions of the testimony of our consciences, and that a "man's own conscience is to him instead of a thousand witnesses:" and it is likewise the judge which declares the law, and what we ought, or ought not to have done, in such or such a case, and accordingly passeth sentence upon us by acquitting or condemning us. Thus, according to common use of speech, conscience sustains all imaginable parts in this spiritual court: it is the court, and the bench, and the bar; the accuser, and witness, and register, and all.

But I shall only at present consider conscience in the most common and famous notion of it, as it is the principle or faculty whereby we judge of moral good and evil, and do accordingly direct and govern our actions: so that, in short, conscience is nothing else but the judgment of a man's own mind concerning the morality of his actions; that is, the good, or evil, or indifference of them; telling us what things are commanded by God, and consequently are our duty; what things are forbidden by him, and consequently are sinful; what things are neither commanded nor forbidden, and consequently are indifferent. I proceed, in the

V. Fifth place, To give some rules and directions for the keeping of a conscience void of offence. And they shall be these following:

First, Never in any case to act contrary to the persuasion and conviction of our conscience. For that certainly is a great sin, and that which properly offends the conscience and renders us guilty; guilt being nothing else but trouble arising in our minds, from a consciousness of having done contrary to what we are verily persuaded was our duty: and though perhaps this persuasion is not always well grounded, yet the guilt is the same so long as this persuasion continues; because every man's conscience is a kind of God to him, and accuseth or absolves him according to the present persuasion of it. And therefore we ought to take great care not to offend against the light and conviction of our own mind.

Secondly, We should be very careful to inform our consciences aright, that we may not mistake concerning our duty; or if we do, that our error and mistake may not be grossly wilful and faulty.

And this rule is the more necessary to be considered and regarded by us, because generally men are apt to think it a sufficient excuse for any thing, that they did it according to their conscience. But this will appear to be a dangerous mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, if we consider these two things:

First, That men may be guilty of the most heinous sins in following an erroneous conscience.

Secondly, And these sins may prove damnable without a particular repentance for them.

First, That men may be guilty of the most heinous sins, in following an erroneous conscience.

Men may neglect and abuse themselves so far, as to do some of the worst and wickedest things in the world with a persuasion that they do well. Our Saviour tells his disciples that the time should come when the Jews should put them to death, thinking they did God good service: nay, the Jews murdered the Son of God himself through ignorance and a false persuasion of mind: "Father, forgive them, (says our blessed Lord, when he was breathing out his soul upon the cross,) for they know not what they do." And St. Peter, after he had charged the Jews with killing the Prince of life, he presently adds, "I wot that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers." And St. Paul, in mitigation of that great crime, says, "had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of life and glory:" and concerning himself, he tells us, That he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth: and yet, notwithstanding that he acted herein according to the persuasion of his conscience, he tells us, that he had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, and a murderer, and in a word the greatest of sinners. So that men may be guilty of the greatest sins in following an erroneous conscience. And,

John xvi. 2.

Luke xxiii. 34.

Acts iii. 17.

Acts xxvi. 9.

Secondly, These sins may prove damnable, without a particular repentance for them. Where the ignorance and mistake is not grossly wilful, there God will accept of a general repentance; but where it is grossly wilful, great sins committed upon it are not pardoned without a particular repentance for them: and an error which proceeds from want of ordinary human care and due government of a man's

self, is in a great degree wilful: as when it proceeds from an unreasonable and obstinate prejudice; from great pride and self-conceit, and contempt of counsel and instruction; or from a visible bias of self-interest; or when it is accompanied with a furious passion and zeal, prompting men to cruel and horrible things, contrary to the light of nature, and the common sense of humanity: an error proceeding from such causes, and producing such effects, is wilful in so high a degree, that whatever evil is done in virtue of it is almost equally faulty with a direct and wilful violation of the law of God.

The ignorance and mistake doth indeed make the person so mistaken more capable of forgiveness, which is the ground of our Saviour's prayer for his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." St. Paul likewise tells us that he found mercy upon this account, "Nevertheless, (says he,) I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief;" that is, through a false persuasion of mind, not believing it to be a sin: and yet he did not obtain this mercy without a particular conviction of his fault and repentance for it. And St. Peter, after he had convinced the Jews of their great sin in crucifying Christ, though they did it ignorantly, yet he exhorts them to a particular and deep repentance for it, as necessary to the pardon and forgiveness of it: and therefore, after he had said, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers;" he immediately adds, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

1 Tim. i. 13.

Acts iii. 19.

So that it highly concerns men to consider what opinions they embrace in order to practise, and not

to suffer themselves to be hurried away by an unreasonable prejudice and a heady passion, without a due and calm examination of things; not to be overborne by pride, or humour, or partiality, or interest, or by a furious and extravagant zeal: because proportionably to the voluntariness of our error, will be the guilt of our practice pursuant to that error. Indeed, where our error is involuntary, and morally invincible, God will consider it, and make allowance for it; but where it is voluntary, and occasioned by our own gross fault and neglect, we are bound to consider and rectify our mistake: for whatever we do contrary to the law of God and our duty, in virtue of that false persuasion, we do it at our utmost peril, and must be answerable to God for it, notwithstanding we did it according to the dictate of our conscience.

A third rule is this, That in all doubts of conscience we endeavour to be equal and impartial, and do not lay all the weight of our doubts on one side, when there is perhaps as much or greater reason of doubting on the other: and consequently, that we be as tractable and easy to receive satisfaction of our doubts in one kind as in another, and be equally contented to have them overruled in cases that are equal: I mean, where our passions and interest are not concerned, as well as where they are. And if we do not do this, it is a sign that we are partial in our pretences of conscience, and that we do not aim merely at the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, but have some other interest and design.

For it is a very suspicious thing, when men's doubts and scruples bear all on one side, especially if it be on that side which is against charity, and peace, and obedience to government, whether eccle-

siastical or civil; in this case I think that a mere doubt, and much more a scruple, may, nay ought in reason to be overruled by the command of authority, by the opinion and judgment of wise and good men, and in consideration of the public peace, and of the unity and edification of the church.

Not that a man is in any case to go against the clear persuasion and conviction of his own mind; but when there is only a mere doubt concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of a thing, it seems to me in that case very reasonable, that a man should suffer a mere doubt or scruple to be overruled by any of those weighty considerations which I mentioned before.

The fourth rule is, That all pretences of conscience are vehemently to be suspected, which are accompanied with turbulent passion and a furious zeal. It is a hundred to one but such a man's conscience is in the wrong. It is an excellent saying of St. James, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;" that is, the fierce passions of men are no proper instruments to promote religion, and to accomplish any thing that is good. And therefore if any man be transported with a wild zeal, and pretend conscience for his fury, it is great odds but he is in an error; none are so likely to judge amiss, as they whose minds are clouded and blinded by their passions:

Jam. i. 12.

Nubila mens est,
Hæc ubi regnant.

Boeth.

And if men would carefully observe themselves, they might almost certainly know when they act upon reason, and a true principle of conscience. A

good conscience is easy to itself, and pleased with its own doings; but when a man's passion and discontent are a weight upon his judgment, and do, as it were, bear down his conscience to a compliance, no wonder if this puts a man's mind into a very unnatural and uneasy state.

There can hardly be a broader sign that a man is in the wrong, than to rage and be confident: because this plainly shews that the man's conscience is not settled upon clear reason, but that he hath brought over his conscience to his interest, or to his humour and discontent.

And though such a man may be so far blinded by his passion, as not to see what is right, yet methinks he should feel himself to be in the wrong, by his being so very hot and impatient.

Art thou sure thou art in the right? thou art a happy man, and hast reason to be pleased: what cause then, what need is there of being angry? Hath a man reason on his side? What would he have more? Why then does he fly out into passion? which, as it gives no strength to a bad argument, so I could never yet see that it was any grace and advantage to a good one.

Of the great evil, and the perpetual mistake of this furious kind of zeal, the Jews are a lively and a lamentable example, in their carriage towards our blessed Saviour and his apostles: and, more particularly, St. Paul, when he persecuted the Christians, from a false and erroneous persuasion of his conscience. Hear how St. Paul describes himself and his own doings, whilst he was acted by an erroneous conscience: "I persecuted (says he,) this way, unto the death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women:" and in

Acts xxii. 4.

another chapter, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Here was his erroneous conscience. Let us next see what were the unhappy concomitants and effects of it: (ver. 10, 11.) "Which things (says he) I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints I shut up in prison; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them, and punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to strange cities." When conscience transports men with such a furious zeal and passion, it is hardly ever in the right; or, if it should happen to be so, they who are thus transported, by their ungracious way of maintaining the truth, and their ill management of a good cause, have found out a cunning way to be in the wrong, even when they are in the right. Acts xxvi. 9.

Fifthly, All pretences of conscience are likewise to be suspected, which are not accompanied with modesty and humility, and a teachable temper and disposition, willing to learn, and to be better informed. A proud and conceited temper of mind is very likely to run into mistakes; because pride and fulness of a man's self, does keep out knowledge, and obstructs all the passages by which wisdom and instruction should enter into men: besides that it provokes God to abandon men to their own follies and mistakes; for God resisteth the proud, but the meek will he guide in judgment, and will give more grace and wisdom to the humble. When men are once come to this, to think themselves wiser than their teachers, and to despise and cast off their guides, no wonder if then they go astray.

Lastly, Let us be sure to mind that which is our plain and unquestionable duty—the great things of religion, wherein the life and substance of it doth consist; and the things likewise "which make for peace, and whereby we may edify one another:" and let us not suffer our disputes about lesser matters to prejudice and hinder our main duty: but let it be our great care, not to fail in those greater things which are comprehended under the two great commandments of the law, the love of God and of our neighbour. Let us be strict and constant in our piety and devotion towards God; chaste and temperate in reference to ourselves; just and honest, kind and charitable, humble and meek, patient and peaceable towards all men; submissive and obedient to our superiors, natural, civil, and spiritual. A due regard to these great virtues of the Christian life, is the way to keep "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men:" and surely, the best means to have our doubts cleared about matters of lesser moment in religion, is heartily to set about the practice of the great and unquestionable duties of it: so our blessed Saviour hath assured us, that "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of his doctrine, whether it be of God." I come now, in the

John vii. 17.

VI. Sixth and last place, To consider the great motive and encouragement to this conscientious care of our lives and actions; which St. Paul here tells us was his belief of a resurrection, and of the rewards and punishments consequent upon it: "I have hope (says he) toward God; that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust: for this cause, therefore, I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men."

If we believe the resurrection of the dead, and a future judgment, we ought to be very careful to discharge a good conscience now, in order to the rendering of a good account hereafter; that "we may be sincere and without offence, with respect to the day of Christ," as the apostle expresseth it. For when that great day of recompences shall come, we shall most assuredly find, that nothing will then raise our hearts, and make us to lift up our heads with joy, like the witness of a good conscience: and, therefore, we should make that our constant care and companion now, which will then be our great comfort and rejoicing, a good conscience, and the testimony of it, "that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world."

And, on the contrary, when we come to appear before the great Judge of the world, nothing will fill our minds with so much terror, and our faces with so much confusion, as the clamorous accusations of a guilty conscience; which will be more than a thousand witnesses against us, and will anticipate our condemnation, and pass almost as severe a sentence upon us as the judge himself can.

This is that which will make the sinner to droop, and to hang down his head for ever: and one of the principal ingredients of his misery and torment will be the perpetual regret and remorse of his own mind, for his wilful wickedness and folly; which will kindle a fire within him, as hot as that without him, and as hard to be quenched.

This consideration ought to have a mighty operation upon us, to make us very careful to have consciences void of offence now, that they may be free from torment and anguish hereafter: that, when we shall come into the other world, we may not be eter-

nally displeased with ourselves, and enraged at our own doings; but may carry with us thither consciences clear of all guilt, either by innocency, or by repentance.

The firm belief of a future state of eternal happiness or misery in another world, is the great weight or spring that sets a-going those two powerful principles of human activity, the hopes and the fears of men; and is, in its nature, so fitted to raise these passions to that degree, that did not experience shew us the contrary, one would think it morally impossible for human nature to resist the mighty force of it.

All men are sensible, more or less, at one time or other, of the true force of these arguments; but the mischief is, that in some persons they work quite the wrong way, and, instead of leading men to repentance, they drive them to infidelity: they cannot deny the force of these arguments, if they were true; but that they may avoid the force of them, they will not believe them to be true: and so far they are in the right, that granting these things to be true, they cannot but acknowledge that they ought to live otherwise than they do: but here is their fatal miscarriage, that, being resolved upon an evil course, since they cannot reconcile their practice with such principles as these, they will fit their principles to their practice; and so they will believe nothing at all of the rewards and punishments of another world, lest this should disturb them in their course. Vain men! as if heaven and hell must needs vanish and disappear, because some witty but wicked men have no mind to believe them!

These men are infidels in their own defence, and merely for the quiet of their own minds; that their

consciences may not perpetually rate them, and fly in their faces. For a right belief and an evil conscience are but unsuitable companions; they are quarrelsome neighbours, and must needs live very uneasily by one another. He that believes the principles of religion, and yet is conscious to himself that he hath lived contrary to them and still continues to do so, how can he possibly have any peace and quiet in his mind? unless like Jonah he can sleep in a storm, and his conscience be, as it were, seared with a hot iron: for if his conscience be awake, and in any degree sensible, the evident danger of eternal ruin, continually hanging over him, must in reason either drive him to repentance or to despair: if so forcible and violent an argument can make no impression upon us, we are stupid and bewitched, we are lost and undone, we are wretched and miserable for ever.

But besides the future reward of a holy and conscientious course, which is unspeakable and full of glory; it hath also this present fruit, this earnest, as I may say, and ready money in hand, the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, which is much more valuable than thousands of gold and silver, the unspeakable comfort whereof every man will then find, when he hath most need of it: for it will be matter of great joy to him, not only under the sorest afflictions and calamities of life, but even at the hour of death; when the miseries of life oppress him, and the sorrows of death compass him about, and the pangs of it are ready to take hold of him.

There is certainly no such comfort under the evils and afflictions of this life as a faithful witness in our breasts of our own innocency and integrity: when

we are afflicted by God, or persecuted and reviled by men, it cannot but be a mighty consolation to us, to be conscious to ourselves of our own sincerity. For though no man can acquit and justify himself before God, as to the perfect innocency of his life, in which sense St. Paul says, that "though he knew nothing by himself, yet was he not thereby justified;" I say, though no man can plead perfect innocency, yet, as to the general course and tenor of an unblamable life, a good man may appeal to God, and even when he afflicts him, may look upon him as a tender and compassionate Father, and not as an angry and revengeful Judge.

1 Cor. iv. 4

With this, holy and patient Job, under all those terrible disasters and calamities which befel him, was able in some measure to comfort himself: after he had lost all, and he had a great deal to lose; when he was forsaken of all other comfort, even the charitable opinion of his best friends concerning his sincerity; in these sad and disconsolate circumstances, what was it that bore up his spirit? nothing but the conscience of his own integrity. See with what resolution and constancy of mind he asserts and maintains it: "I will not (says he,) remove mine integrity from me: my righteousness will I hold fast, and will not let it go: mine heart shall not reproach me, so long as I live." You see, that when every thing else was gone, his integrity stuck by him, and supported him to the last.

Job xxvii. 5, 6.

And as to persecutions and sufferings from men, our own innocency, and the goodness of our cause, will be our best comfort under them: when we are not guilty to ourselves that we have deserved them from men, and are inwardly assured that whatever

we patiently suffer for God and a good conscience, will all turn to our account another day, and work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

This was that which supported the first Christians, that noble army of martyrs, under all those bitter and cruel persecutions, which had otherwise been beyond all human patience to have endured: this comforted them in all their tribulations; "Our rejoicing (says St. Paul,) is this, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world."

So likewise under that inferior but equally malicious sort of persecution, of which this age is so very profuse and prodigal—I mean the causeless calumnies and reproaches of men: if under these we can but approve our consciences to God, the uncharitable censures of men are not so much to be regarded by us; some impression they will make upon a tender mind, but we must not, if we can help it, let them sink too deep into our spirits: "If our hearts condemn us not, we may have confidence towards God;" and then surely much more towards men: if God and our own consciences do but acquit us, methinks it should be no such difficult matter to bear the slanders and hard censures of men.

1 John iii. 21.

But, above all other times, the comfort of a good conscience is most sensible and most considerable at the hour of death! for as nothing dejects a man's spirits more, and sends him down with so much sorrow to the grave, as the guilt of an evil conscience; what terror and anguish, what rage and despair, do seize upon a sinner at that time, when he reflects upon what he hath done, and considers what he is like to suffer? so, on the other hand, there is nothing

that revives and raises the fainting spirits of a dying man, like the conscience of a holy and useful life, which hath brought glory to God and good to men.

Prov. xiv. 32. "The wicked (says Solomon,) is driven away in his wickedness;" that is, he is carried out of the world, as it were in a storm and tempest; "but the righteous hath hope in his death:" he usually dies calmly and comfortably.

Psalm xxxvii. 37. "Mark the perfect man, (says David,) and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

If a man be conscious to himself that he hath sincerely endeavoured to keep the commandments of God, and to do the things which please him; if he hath lived inoffensively, and, as St. Paul saith of himself, "in all good conscience before God and men;" what an unspeakable consolation must it be to him, in that dark and gloomy time, and when he is walking through the valley of the shadow of death, then to fear no evil? and to be able with our blessed Saviour to say, though in a much inferior measure and degree,

Acts xxiii. 1.

Joh. xvii. 4. "Father, I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do:" and to be able to look death in the face with the like courage and constancy of mind as St. Paul did, when he saw it approaching towards him—"I am now (says he) ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me in that day." A comfortable death, that is free from the stings and upbraidings, the terrors and tortures,

2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

the confusion and amazement of a guilty conscience, is a happiness so desirable, as to be well worth the care and endeavour of a man's whole life.

Let us then have a conscientious regard to the whole compass of our duty, and, with St. Paul, let us exercise ourselves "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men:" and let us never do any thing whereby we shall offer violence to the light of our minds. God hath given us this principle to be our constant guide and companion; and whoever, after a due care to inform himself aright, does sincerely follow the dictate and direction of this guide, shall never fatally miscarry: but whoever goes against the clear dictate and conviction of his conscience, in so doing he undermines the foundation of his own comfort and peace, and sins against God and his own soul.

And to the end we may keep our consciences clear of guilt, we should frequently examine ourselves, and look back upon the actions of our lives, and call ourselves to a strict account for them; that whereinsoever we have failed of innocency, we may make it up by repentance; and may get our consciences cleared of guilt by pardon and forgiveness: and if we do not do this, we cannot with confidence rely upon the testimony of our consciences; because many great sins may slip out of our memories without a particular repentance for them, which yet do require and stand in need of a particular repentance.

Especially we should search our consciences more narrowly at these more solemn times of repentance, and when we are preparing ourselves to receive the holy sacrament: and if at these times our hearts do accuse and condemn us for any thing,

we should not only heartily lament and bewail it before God, but sincerely resolve by God's grace to reform in that particular, and from that time to break off that sin which we have then repented of, and have asked forgiveness of God for: for if after we have repented of it, we return to it again, we wound our consciences afresh, and involve them in a new guilt.

In the last place, we should reverence our consciences, and stand in awe of them, and have a great regard to their testimony and verdict; for conscience is a domestic judge, and a kind of a familiar god: and therefore, next to the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth, every man should be afraid to offend his own reason and conscience, which, whenever we knowingly do amiss, will beat us with many stripes, and handle us more severely than the greatest enemy we have in the world: so that, next to the dreadful sentence of the great day, every man hath reason to dread the sentence of his own conscience; "God indeed is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things;" but under him we have the greatest reason to fear the judgment of our own consciences: for nothing but that can give us comfort, and nothing can create so much trouble and disquiet to us.

And though the judgment of our consciences be not always the judgment of God, yet we have great reason to have great regard to it; and that upon several accounts, which I shall but briefly mention, and so conclude.

First, Because the judgment of our conscience is free from any compulsion. Nobody can force it from us whether we will or no; and make us to pass sentence against ourselves, whether we see reason for it or not.

Secondly, The sentence of our own conscience is very likely to be impartial, at least not too hard on the severe side, because men naturally love themselves, and are too apt to be favourable in their own case. All the world cannot bribe a man against himself: there is no man whose mind is not either distempered by melancholy, or deluded by false principles, that is apt to be credulous against himself, and his own interest and peace.

Thirdly, The judgment which our conscience passeth upon our own actions, is upon the most intimate and certain knowledge of them, and of their true motives and ends. We may easily be deceived in our judgment of the actions of other men, and may think them to be much better or worse than in truth they are: because, we cannot certainly tell with what mind they were done, and what circumstances there may be to excuse or aggravate them; how strong the temptation was, or how weak the judgment of him that was seduced by it into error and folly.

But we are conscious to all the secret springs, and motives, and circumstances of our own actions: we can descend into our own hearts, and dive to the bottom of them, and search into the most retired corners of our intentions and ends; which none, besides ourselves, but only God can do; for excepting him only, "none knows the things of a man but the spirit of a man which is in him."

Fourthly, The sentence of our conscience is peremptory and inexorable, and there is no way to avoid it. Thou mayest possibly fly from the wrath of other men, to the uttermost parts of the earth, but thou canst not stir one step from thyself; in vain shalt thou call upon the mountains and rocks to fall

on thee, and hide thee from the sight of thine own conscience.

Wretched and miserable man! when thou hast offended and wounded thy conscience; for whither canst thou go to escape the eye of this witness, the terror of this judge, the torment of this executioner? A man may as soon get rid of himself, and quit his own being, as fly from the sharp accusations, and stinging guilt of his own conscience; which will perpetually haunt him, till it be done away by repentance and forgiveness.

We account it a fearful thing to be haunted by evil spirits, and yet the spirit of a man which is in him, thoroughly affrighted with its own guilt, may be a more ghastly and amazing spectacle than all the devils in hell: there is no such frightful apparition in the world, as a man's own guilty and terrible conscience staring him in the face: a spirit that is thus wounded, who can bear?

To conclude: Let these considerations prevail with us always to live, not with regard to the opinion of others, which may be grounded upon mistake, or may not indeed be their opinion, but their flattery; but with regard to the judgment of our own conscience, which, though it may sometimes be mistaken, can never be bribed and corrupted: we may be hypocrites to others, and base flatterers, but our consciences, whenever they are thoroughly awakened, are always sincere, and deal truly with us, and speak to us as they think.

Therefore, whatever we say or do, let it be sincere: for though hypocrisy may, for a while, preserve our esteem and reputation with others, yet it can signify nothing to the peace of our own minds: and then, what will it avail us to conceal any thing

from other men, when we can hide nothing that we can say or do from our own consciences?

The sum of all is this: If we would keep a conscience void of offence, let us always be calm and considerate, and have the patience to examine things thoroughly and impartially: let us be humble and willing to learn, and never too proud and stiff to be better informed: let us do what we can to free ourselves from prejudice and passion, from self-conceit and self-interest, which are often too strong a bias upon the judgments of the best men, as we may see every day in very sad and melancholy instances: and, having taken all due care to inform our consciences aright, let us follow the judgment of our minds in what we do; and then we have done what we can to please God.

And if we would always take this care to keep a good conscience, we should always be easy, and good company to ourselves: but if we offend our consciences, by doing contrary to the clear dictate and conviction of them, we make the unhappiest breach in the world; we stir up a quarrel in our own breasts, and arm our own minds against ourselves: we create an enemy to ourselves in our own bosoms, and fall out with the best and most inseparable companion of our lives.

And, on the contrary, a good conscience will be a continual feast, and will give us that comfort and courage in an evil day, which nothing else can; and then, whatever happens to us, we may "commit ourselves to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator:" to whom, with our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost the Comforter, be all honour and glory, now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXIX.

[Preached before the Queen at Whitehall, September 16, 1691.]

HOW TO KEEP A TRULY RELIGIOUS FAST.

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?—ZECH. vii. 5.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the people of the Jews, who were then rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, and had already far advanced the work, though it was not perfectly finished till about two years after, send to the priests and the prophets to inquire of them, whether they should still continue the fast of the fifth month, which they had begun in Babylon, and continued to observe during the seventy years of their captivity, in a sad remembrance of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem; or should not now rather turn it into a day of feasting and gladness?

To this inquiry, God, by his prophet, returns an answer in this and the following chapter. And first he expostulates with them concerning those their monthly fasts, whether they did indeed deserve that name, and were not rather a mere show and pretence of a religious fast: (verses 4, 5.) "Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and

seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?" The inquiry was particularly concerning the fast of the fifth month, because the occasion of that was more considerable than of all the other; but the answer of God mentions the fasts of the fifth and seventh months, these two being probably observed with greater solemnity than the other.

But for our clearer understanding of this, it will be requisite to consider the original and occasion of all their monthly fasts; which, as appears from other places of Scripture, in short, was this:—when the Jews were carried away captive into Babylon, in a deep sense of this great judgment of God upon them for their sins, and of the heavy affliction which they lay under, they appointed four annual fasts, which they observed during their seventy years' captivity; viz. The fast of the fourth month, in remembrance of the enemies breaking through the wall of Jerusalem, which we find mentioned Jer. lii. 6, 7. The fast of the fifth month, in memory of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, (ver. 12, 13.) The fast of the seventh month, in remembrance of the slaying of Gedaliah, upon which followed the dispersion of the Jews, of which we have an account, Jer. xli. 1, 2. And the fast of the tenth month, in memory of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, of which we find mention, 2 Kings xxv. 1.

In this order we find these four annual fasts mentioned, Zech. viii. 19; not according to the order of the events, but of the months of the several years in which these events happened: and there likewise God gives a full answer to this inquiry concerning the continuance of these annual fasts, namely,

that they should for the future be turned into solemn days of joy and gladness. "And the word of the Lord of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts."

Zech. viii. 18, 19.

I return now to the text, "Did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?" that is, did these fasts truly serve to any religious end and purpose? Did not the people content themselves with a mere external show and performance, without any inward affliction and humiliation of their souls, in order to a real repentance? Did they not still go on in their sins; nay, and add to them upon these occasions, fasting for strife, and debate, and oppression? In a word, were they not worse rather than better for them? And therefore God had no regard to them, as it follows in this chapter: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widows nor the fatherless, the stranger nor the poor; and let none of you imagine mischief against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, they made their heart as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent by his Spirit in the former prophets: therefore came great wrath from the Lord of hosts: therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts."

Ch. vii. 9, 10, 11, 12.

So that notwithstanding these outward solemnities of fasting and prayer, here was nothing of a religious fast; "Did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?" They were sensible of the judgments of God which were broken in upon them, but they did not turn from their sins, but persisted still in their obstinacy and disobedience.

And what God here by the prophet Zachary calls fasting unto him, even unto him, the prophet Isaiah calls the fast which God hath chosen, and an acceptable day to the Lord. "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast as I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily: then shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer," &c.

From all which passages we may easily understand wherein these monthly fasts of the Jews were defective, and what was the fault that God finds with them when he expostulates so severely in the text: "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?" In the general, the

fault which God finds with them was this—that these solemnities did not serve any real end and purpose of religion, but failed in their main design, which was a sincere repentance and reformation of their lives: for which reason he tells them, that they were not at all acceptable to him, nor esteemed by him as performed unto him, because they did not answer the true intention and design of them.

My work at this time shall be, First, To consider in general what it is to fast unto God; that is, to keep a truly religious fast. Secondly, to bring the matter nearer to ourselves, I shall consider more particularly, What the duty of this day, appointed by their Majesties for a solemn humiliation and repentance throughout the nation, does require at our hands.

I. I shall consider in general what it is to fast unto God; that is, to keep a truly religious fast. And of this I shall give an account in the following particulars. First, A truly religious fast consists in the afflicting of our bodies by a strict abstinence, that so they may be fit and proper instruments to promote and help forward the grief and trouble of our minds. Secondly, In the humble confession of our sins to God with shame and confusion of face, and with a hearty contrition and sorrow for them. Thirdly, In an earnest deprecation of God's displeasure, and humble supplications to him that he would avert his judgments and turn away his anger from us. Fourthly, In intercession with God for such spiritual and temporal blessings upon ourselves and others as are needful and convenient. Fifthly, In alms and charity to the poor, that our humiliation and prayers may find acceptance with God. I do but mention these particulars, that I

may more largely insist upon that which I mainly intended, and proposed to consider in the next place; namely,

II. What the duty of this day, appointed by their Majesties for a solemn humiliation and repentance throughout the nation, doth require at our hands. And this I shall endeavour to comprise in the following particulars. First, That we should humble ourselves before God every one for his own personal sins, whereby he hath provoked God, and increased the public guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgments and vengeance of God upon the nation. Secondly, That we should likewise heartily lament and bewail the sins of others; especially the great and crying sins of the nation, committed by all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and whereby the wrath and indignation of Almighty God hath been so justly incensed against us. Thirdly, We should most importunately deprecate those terrible judgments of God to which these our great and crying sins have so justly exposed us. Fourthly, We should pour out our earnest prayers and supplications to Almighty God for the preservation of their Majesties' sacred persons, and for the establishment and prosperity of their government, and for the good success of their arms and forces by sea and land. Fifthly, Our fasting and prayers should be accompanied with our charity and alms to the poor and needy. Lastly, We should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives. Of these I shall, by God's assistance, speak as briefly and as plainly as I can, and so as every one of us may understand what God requires of him upon so solemn an occasion as this.

First, We should humble ourselves before God every one for his own personal sins and miscarriages, whereby he hath provoked God and increased the public guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgments and vengeance of God upon the nation. Our humiliation and repentance should begin with ourselves and our own sins, because repentance is always designed to end in reformation; but there cannot be a general reformation without the reformation of particular persons which do constitute and make up the generality.

And this Solomon prescribes as the true method of a national reformation, and the proper effect of a public humiliation and repentance, in that admirable prayer of his at the dedication of the temple: "If there be (says he) in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust; or if there be caterpillar; or if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities: whatever plague, whatever sickness there be; what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, *who shall know every man the plague of his own heart*, and spread forth his hands towards this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his way, whose heart thou knowest; for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men; that they may fear thee, all the days which they live in the land thou which gavest to their fathers."

1 Kings viii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

You see here that, in case of any public judgment or calamity, the humiliation and repentance of a nation must begin with particular persons: "what prayer or supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, *who shall know every man*

the plague of his own heart: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive." Particular persons must be convinced of their personal sins and transgressions, before God will hear the prayers and forgive the sins of a nation.

And because we cannot perform this part of confessing and bewailing our own personal sins, and of testifying our particular repentance for them, in the public congregation, any otherwise than by joining with them in a general humiliation and repentance; therefore we should do well, on the day before the public fast, or at least the morning before we go to the public assembly, to humble ourselves before God in our families, and especially in our closets; confessing to him, with great shame and sorrow, all the particular sins and offences, together with the several aggravations of them, which we have been guilty of against the Divine Majesty, so far as we are able to call them particularly to our remembrance; and earnestly to beg of God the pardon and forgiveness of them, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ.

And so likewise, after we return from the church, we should retire again into our closets, and there renew our repentance, with most serious and sincere resolutions of reforming in all those particulars which we have confessed and repented of. And if we would have our resolutions to come to any good, we must make them as distinct and particular as we can; and charge it upon ourselves, as to such and such sins, for which we have declared our sorrow and repentance, that we will amend and do better for the future.

And we should endeāvour, also, to fortify these good resolutions, in the best manner we can, by se-

rious consideration, and by solemn promises of better obedience, and of a more conscientious care of our lives and all our actions for the future: and then, with the greatest earnestness and importunity, we should implore the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit to this purpose.

By this means the great end of a solemn fast and humiliation will be in some good measure attained, and not wholly defeated, as for the most part it is, by being huddled up and lost in a confused and general repentance, which commonly ends together with the public assembly, without any real or permanent effect upon particular persons: perhaps a great part of the congregation may have been in some degree sorry for their sins; but after all no man forsakes them, nor is the better for his sorrow, but leaves that behind him in the church, and carries home with him the same affection for his sins which he had before, and a secret resolution not to leave them.

Thus it was with the people of the Jews. They had their solemn monthly fasts, in which they made a great show of humiliation, hanging down their heads like a bulrush for a day, and spreading sackcloth and ashes under them: but there was no inward change of their minds, no real reformation of their lives; and as soon as ever the public solemnity was over, they turned every one to his former evil course. So God complains of them: "I hearkened, (says he,) and I heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? but they turned every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." "They spake not aright;" that is,

Jer. viii, 6.

they did not take the right method for an effectual repentance: they humbled themselves indeed before God, and repented at random for the sins of the nation in general, which they were all of them ready enough to acknowledge, and to lay a heavy load of guilt upon the community: but all this while they never reflected upon themselves in particular; they had no sense, no conviction of their own personal faults and miscarriages, without which there can be no true general repentance; "No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?"

And as they had no sense of their own particular sins which they had been guilty of, so they had no thought of leaving them; but as soon as ever the public fasting and humiliation was over, they returned to them again with the same eager and furious appetite: "They turned every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle;" that is, without any consideration or sense of danger.

Secondly, We should likewise upon this day heartily lament and bewail the sins of others; especially the great and crying sins of the nation, committed by all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and whereby the wrath and indignation of Almighty God hath been so justly incensed against us.

This hath been the temper and practice of good men in all ages, to be greatly troubled and afflicted for the sins of others, as well as for their own; to mourn for them in secret, as the prophet Jeremy does for the obstinacy and impenitency of the Jews, and for the terrible judgments and calamities which their sins were ready to bring down upon them: "But if ye will not return, (says he to that obdurate people,) my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride (or obstinacy), and mine Jer. xiii. 17.

eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive." And indeed almost the whole prophecy of Jeremy, and his book of Lamentations, are little else but a perpetual humiliation and mourning for the sins of that people, and for the judgments of God which he saw already inflicted, or foresaw to be coming upon them.

We read likewise of Lot, when he dwelt in Sodom, "How he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righteous man, (saith St. Peter,) dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."

Holy David, also, upon all occasions, testifies his great trouble and grief for the sins which he saw committed by others, and was so affected with them, that he trembled at the very thought of them: "Rivers of tears (says he) run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." And in the same psalm, "Horror hath taken hold of me, because of the wicked which forsake thy law." And again, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved, because they kept not thy word."

Psal. cxix. 136.

Verse 53.

Verse 158.

And how does Daniel humble himself before God and mourn, and in the name of all the people, and of all degrees and orders of men among them, take shame to himself and them, for the great sins which they had been guilty of? "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, O Lord; righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face as at this day: to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee."

Dan. ix. 5. 7, 8.

With what trouble and confusion does Ezra, upon a solemn day of fasting and humiliation, acknowledge and bewail the sins of the people? "O my God, (says he,) I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespasses grown up unto the heavens: since the days of our fathers, we have been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hands of the kings of the lands," &c. Ezra ix. 6, 7.

And thus also ought we, the people of this sinful land, upon this solemn day of fasting and humiliation, to set our sins in order before us with all their heinous aggravations; and in the bitterness of our souls to lament and bewail that general prevalence of impiety and vice, which hath overspread the nation, and diffused itself through all ranks and degrees of men, magistrates, ministers, and people. I shall speak something more particularly concerning each of these.

1. The sins of the magistrates, and those that are in authority. They that make laws for others, and are to see to the execution of them, ought to be strict observers of them themselves. For it must needs put a man not a little out of countenance, to be severe upon those faults in others, of which he knows himself to be notoriously guilty. And yet how many are there, whose place and duty it is to correct the vices and immoralities of others, who are far from being examples of virtue themselves? and, therefore, it is no wonder that there is so lame and unequal a distribution of justice in the nation, and that magistrates are so cold and slack in the discountenancing of vice and impiety, and in putting

the good and wholesome laws made against them in execution: as against the profanation of the Lord's day, by secular business, by vain sports and pastimes, which, by the very nature of them, are apt to dissolve the minds of men into mirth and pleasure, and to carry them off from all serious thoughts of God and religion, and from the meditations of another world; and to give the devil an advantage, and an opportunity, which he never fails to take, to steal the good seed, the word of God, which they have heard that day, out of their hearts, and to make it of none effect: and, which is yet worse, by lewd and sinful practices, which are unlawful at any time, but upon that day are a double breach and violation of God's law.

And, likewise, by neglecting to put in execution the laws against profane swearing and cursing, for which the land mourns, and against drunkenness, and adultery, and fornication, which are so common, and so impudently committed among us; whether they be civil or ecclesiastical laws: and it is hard to say which of them are most remissly executed.

And, to mention no more, by neglecting to prosecute that horrible sin of murder, so frequently now committed in our streets, beyond the example of former ages, with that severity and impartiality, which is necessary to free the nation from the guilt of that crying sin, which calls so loud to heaven for vengeance.

And all this, notwithstanding the magistrates are under the oath of God to put the laws in due execution against all these crimes, so far as they come to their knowledge, and fall under their cognizance.

2. The sins of the ministers, who serve at God's altar, and watch over the souls of men, whose blood will be required at their hands, if any of them perish

through their fault and neglect. There is no reason to doubt, but that there are a good number of faithful shepherds in the land, who watch over their flocks with great care and conscience, remembering the dreadful account which they must one day make, to "Him who shall judge the quick and the dead," of the souls committed to their charge.

But yet, how grossly do many of us fail of the faithful discharge of the substantial parts of this high office? wanting a just sense of the inestimable worth and value of the souls of men, for whom Christ died; taking little or no care to instruct them in the good knowledge of the Lord, and to lead them in the way to eternal happiness, by an exemplary conversation.

Nay, too many among us demean themselves so scandalously, as perfectly to undermine the credit and effect of their doctrine, by leading lives so directly contrary to it; and to alienate their people from the church, and to make them to abhor the sacrifice and service of the Lord, by their wicked and unhallowed conversations: hereby exposing them to the craft of seducers, and rendering them an easy prey to the emissaries of the church of Rome, or to any other sect and faction that pretends a greater zeal for religion, or makes a better show of a strict and unblamable life.

For, who will regard or believe those teachers, who give all the evidence that can be, by their lives and actions, that they do not believe themselves and their own doctrines? When all is said, the life and manners of the preacher are the best eloquence, and have that dint and power of persuasion in them, which no words, no art can equal. Whoso lives as he speaks, does, as it is said of our blessed Saviour, "speak as one that hath authority, and not as the

scribes."—"Not as the scribes;" whose words, notwithstanding all the formality and gravity with which they were delivered, did therefore want weight and force, because, as our Saviour tells us of them, "they said, but did not;" their lives were not answerable to their doctrines: whereas, our blessed Saviour therefore "spoke as never man spake," because he lived as never man lived; so innocent, so useful, so exemplary a life: he was holy, harmless, and undefiled: "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips: he fulfilled all righteousness, and went about doing good." This was that which made him so powerful a preacher of righteousness; and we must necessarily fall so much short of him in the authority and efficacy of our sermons, as we do in the holiness and goodness of our lives. Such a preacher, and such a practice as that of our blessed Saviour was, is every way fitted to reprove, and persuade, and reform mankind.

We now live in an age and church, wherein they who are called to be the teachers and guides of souls, ought to take great heed both to their doctrine and their lives; that the name of God may not be blasphemed, and his holy religion brought into contempt by those, who, above all others, are most nearly concerned to preserve and support the credit and honour of it.

And we cannot but see how our religion and church are beset and endangered on every side, by the rude assaults of infidelity, and by the cunning arts of seducing spirits, and by our own intestine heats and divisions: and it can never be sufficiently lamented, no, though it were with tears of blood, that we, whose particular charge and employment it is to build up the souls of men in a holy faith, and

in the resolution of a good life, should, for want of due instruction, and by the dissolute and profligate lives of too many among us, and by inflaming our needless differences about lesser things, have so great a hand in pulling down religion, and in betraying the souls of men either to downright infidelity, or to a careless neglect and profane contempt of all religion.

May not God justly expostulate this matter with us, as he did of old with the people of the Jews? "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?" When they who are the pastors and guides of souls, have, by their ill conduct and management, brought matters to that pass, that the generality of the people sit down contented with the worst state of things, and are become almost indifferent whether they have any religion or not, what can the end of these things be, but that "the kingdom of God will be taken from us, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it?" Jer. v. 30, 31.

If ever there be a public reformation among us, it must begin at the house of God; and they who are the ministers of religion must lead on this work, and be more careful and conscientious in the discharge of that high and holy office, which is committed to them by "the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls." Else, what shall we say when God shall challenge us, as he did once the pastors of the Jewish church, by his prophet, saying, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?" Jer. xiii. 20, 21.

3. The sins of the people: amongst whom there is almost an universal corruption and depravation of manners; insomuch, that impiety and vice seem to have overspread the face of the nation; so that we may take up that sad complaint of the prophet, concerning the people of Israel, and apply it to ourselves; that we "are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers; that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; and that from the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores."

Isa. i. 4, 5.

We may justly stand amazed to consider, how the God of all patience is provoked by us every day; to think how long he hath borne with us, and suffered our manners; our open profaneness and infidelity; our great immoralities, and gross hypocrisy; our insolent contempt of religion, and our ill-favoured counterfeiting of it, for low and sordid ends; and, which is the most melancholy consideration of all the rest, we seem to be degenerated to that degree, that it is very much to be feared, there is hardly integrity enough left amongst us to save us.

And then if we consider further our most uncharitable and unchristian divisions, to the endangering both of our reformed religion, and of the civil rights and liberties of the nation: our incorrigibleness under the judgments of God which we have seen abroad in the earth, and which have in a very severe and terrible manner been inflicted upon these kingdoms, that the inhabitants thereof might learn righteousness: our insensibleness of the hand of God, so visible in his late providences towards us, and in the many merciful and wonderful deliverances which from time to time he hath wrought for us.

And, lastly, If we reflect upon our horrible ingratitude to God our Saviour and mighty deliverer, and to them likewise whom he hath so signally honoured in making them the happy means and instruments of our deliverance: and this, not only expressed by a bold contempt of their authority, but by a most unnatural conspiracy against them with the greatest enemies, not only to the peace of the nation, but likewise to the reformed religion therein professed and by law established: and to the interest of it all the world over.

So that we may say with Ezra, "And now, O our God, what shall we say unto thee after this?" And may not God likewise say to us, as he did more than once to the Jews? "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Ezra ix. 6.

Thirdly, We should likewise upon this day, earnestly deprecate God's displeasure, and make our humble supplications to him, that he would be graciously pleased to avert those terrible judgments which hang over us, and which we have just cause to fear may fall upon us; and that he would be entreated by us at last to be appeased towards us, and to turn from the fierceness or his anger.

This we find the people of God were wont to do upon their solemn days of fasting and prayer; and this God expressly enjoins: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, &c. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: Joel ii. 15, 16, 17.

wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?"

And to this earnest deprecation of his judgments, God promiseth a gracious answer; for so it immediately follows: "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people." Verse 18.

And thus likewise Daniel, when he set his face "to seek the Lord God, by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes," does, in a most humble and earnest manner, deprecate the displeasure of God towards his people, and beg of him to remove his judgments, and to turn away his anger from them. Dan. ix. 3. Verses 16, 17, 18, 19.

"O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquity of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O God, hear the prayer of thy servant and his supplication; and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary which is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear and hear, open thine eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercy: O Lord hear, O Lord forgive, O Lord hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake, O my God, for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

And thus also should we, upon this solemn occasion, cry mightily unto God, and with the greatest importunity deprecate those terrible judgments which we so righteously have deserved, and to which the great and crying sins of the whole nation have so

justly exposed us: humbly beseeching him, not for our righteousness, but for his great mercy; for his own name's sake, and because we are his people, and are called by his name, and because his holy truth and religion are professed amongst us; that he would be pleased to hear the prayers of his servants and their supplications which they have made before him this day, for the Lord's sake.

Fourthly, We should likewise upon this day, pour out our most earnest supplications to Almighty God, for the preservation of their Majesties' sacred persons, and for the prosperity and establishment of their government, and for the good success of their arms and forces by sea and land.

And more especially, since his Majesty, with so many confederate princes and states of Europe, is engaged in so necessary an undertaking for the common good of Christendom, and for the mutual preservation and recovery of their respective rights; we should earnestly implore the favour and assistance of Almighty God in so just and glorious a cause, against the common invader and oppressor of the rights and liberties of mankind:

And that of his infinite goodness he would be graciously pleased to take the person of our sovereign lord the King into the particular care and protection of his providence: that he would secure his precious life from all secret attempts, and from open violence: that he would give his angels charge over him, and cover his head in the day of battle, and crown it with victory over his enemies, and restore him to us again in safety.

And that he would likewise preserve and direct the Queen's Majesty, in whose hands the administration of the government is at present so happily

placed: that he would give her wisdom and resolution for such a time as this, and support and carry her through all the difficulties of it.

And, lastly, that he would bless them both with a long life, and a peaceful and happy reign over us; that under them we may live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

Fifthly, Our fasting and humiliation should be accompanied with our alms and charity to the poor and needy: and we should every one of us, according to the counsel given by the prophet to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity;" hereby intimating, that if there be any way to prevent or remove the judgments of God, and to prolong the tranquillity and happiness of prince and people, a sincere repentance, and a great charity to them that are in necessity and distress, are most likely to prevail with God, not only to respite the ruin of a sinful people, but to incline him to thoughts of peace toward them: for so he promiseth to the Jews upon their sincere repentance, and earnest supplication to him, which are always accompanied with charity to the poor: "For I know the thoughts which I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end: then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you: and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Dan. iv. 27.

Jer. xxix. 11, 12, 13.

And I have often thought that the extraordinary charity of this whole nation, and of our pious princes, who are so ready to every good work, and such

bright and shining examples in this kind, more than once so seasonably extended to the relief of our distressed brethren, who fled hither for refuge from the rage and cruelty of their persecutors: I say, I have often thought, that this very thing, next to the infinite mercy and goodness of Almighty God, hath had a very particular influence upon our preservation and deliverance from those terrible calamities which were just ready to rush in upon us. And what cause have we to thank God, who hath allotted to us this more blessed and merciful part, to give and not to receive; and to be free from persecution ourselves, that so we might be in a capacity to give refuge and relief to them that were persecuted?

There are but few that have the faith to believe it, but certainly charity to the poor is a great security to us in times of evil: so David assures us, speaking of the righteous or charitable man; "he shall not (says he) be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of dearth he shall be satisfied."

And so likewise in times of public distress, when we are beset with cruel and powerful enemies, who, if God were not on our side, would swallow us up, the public charity of a nation hath many times proved its best safeguard and shield: "It shall fight for thee (saith the son of Sirach, speaking of the charity of alms), against thine enemy, more than a mighty shield and strong spear."

And of this, as I said before, I doubt not but we of this nation, by the great mercy and goodness of God to us, have had happy experience in our late wonderful deliverance under the conduct and valour of one of the best and bravest of princes; to whom by too many among us the most unworthy and unthankful returns have been made for all the unwea-

ried pains he hath undergone, and for the many desperate hazards to which he hath exposed himself for our sakes, that ever were made to so great and generous a benefactor: to so great a benefactor, I say, not only to these nations, but even to all Europe, in asserting and maintaining their liberties against the insolent pride and unjust encroachments of one of the greatest oppressors the world hath known for many ages: of whom it may be said as Job doth of the leviathan, "Upon the earth there is not his like: (I am glad I cannot apply what immediately follows, that) he is made without fear; (but surely the next words are apposite enough,) he beholdeth all high things, and is king of all the children of pride:" and yet "He that is higher than the highest, (even) he that sitteth in the heavens, doth laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming."

Job. xli. 33, 34.

To conclude this particular; if we would have our prayers ascend up to heaven, and find acceptance there, our alms must go along with them: so the angel intimates when he says to Cornelius, "Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God:"—"thy prayers and thine alms;" they must go together if we desire that our prayers should be effectual; and the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the fast which God hath chosen, and which is acceptable to him, makes charity and alms a most essential part of it: "Is it not, (says he,) to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am."

Acts. x. 4.

Isa. lviii. 7. 9.

Sixthly, and lastly, We should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives. For in this repentance doth mainly consist: this is the proper fruit and effect of all our humiliation and good resolutions, to forsake our sins, and to become better for the future; more pious and devout towards God, more sober and chaste with regard to ourselves, more just and charitable, more humble and meek towards all men: in a word, more innocent, more useful, and more holy in all manner of conversation.

And without this, all our fasting and humiliation, our most earnest prayers and supplications, will signify nothing: all our sorrow and tears will be but as water spilt upon the ground, and will not turn to any account either to save our own souls, or to preserve this untoward generation, this crooked and perverse nation, from ruin and destruction. So God tells Solomon, that this is the only way to appease and reconcile him to a sinful people: "If my people, which is called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear in heaven and forgive their sin, and heal their land." 2 Chron. vii. 14.

And if this were the happy effect of our prayers and humiliation this day, to turn us from our wicked ways, God would then turn away his anger from us; and, as he promised to the Jews by the prophet Zechary, he would turn these our monthly fasts into joy, and gladness, and cheerful feasts; as he hath in a great measure already done: "Blessed be his great and glorious name." Zec. viii. 19.

But if we will not hearken and obey, can we expect that God should deliver us from the hands of

our enemies, that we may sin against him without fear all the days of our lives? To what purpose should the providence of God take so much care to preserve our religion to us, when we make no better use of it for the direction and government of our lives; when it serves most of us only to talk of it; and too many amongst us, to talk against it, to deride it, and despitefully to use it? If this be the truth of our case, what can we say, why the kingdom of God should not be taken from us, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it? What can we say, why our candlestick should not be removed, and the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, which we have so long enjoyed, and so long rebelled against, should not be utterly extinguished amongst us?

And if I cannot prevail with you to come to these good resolutions and to make them good: if you will not be persuaded to practise, yet be pleased to attend to what we say: hear our words at least, if ye will not do them. This the people of the Jews would do when they were at the worst: so God tells the prophet concerning them: "They come unto thee, as the people cometh; and they sit before thee, as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them."

Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

I had much rather at any time have occasion to praise than to reprove, especially in this great assembly: and yet it is not to be dissembled, that the behaviour of too many in this place is frequently so careless and irreverent, as is very misbecoming those who are in the more peculiar presence of the great and glorious Majesty of heaven and earth, and profess at that very time to worship him.

I am sure, we have a better pattern perpetually before us; of a decent and unaffected devotion,

of a most serious and steady attention, without wandering, without diversion, and without drowsiness: such an example as I cannot but hope will in a short time gain upon us all, and by a more gentle and silent reproof win us to the imitation of it.

And if we could but be prevailed upon to demean ourselves with that reverence, and to hear with that attention, which becomes the worship and the word of God, it might then be hoped that we would consider what is said; and consideration would probably work conviction, and conviction bring us to a better mind, and to a firm purpose of doing what we are inwardly convinced it is both our duty and our interest to do.

Let us then go away from this solemnity, with a resolution to do every one what we ought; truly and earnestly to repent us of our sins past, and to lead a new life for the future; to fear that great and terrible God, in whose presence we have humbled ourselves this day; and to "turn to him that hath smitten us," lest we provoke him to punish us yet seven times more, and after that seven times more, for our sins, and for our impenitency in them, till at last he makes our plagues wonderful.

To conclude: Let us every one, with that true penitent in Job, take words to ourselves, and say, "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Oh! that there were such a heart in us, that it might be well with us, and with our children for ever!"

Which God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON XL.

[Preached before the Queen at Whitehall, March 20th, 1691-2.]

THAT GOD IS THE ONLY HAPPINESS OF MAN.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.—PSALM lxxiii. 25.

THE design of this psalm is to vindicate the goodness and justice of the Divine providence, notwithstanding the prosperous state of the wicked, and the afflicted condition of good men many times in this world. And in the first place, the Psalmist, whoever he was, whether David or Asaph, lays down this for a most certain truth—that God is good to good men: "Of a truth God is good to Israel, to such as are of a clean heart." Ver. 1.

And yet for all this he tells us, that at sometimes he was under no small temptation to question the truth of this principle, when he beheld the promiscuous dispensation of things here below; that the wicked are often prosperous, and good men exposed to great calamities in this life; as if God either neglected human affairs, or had a greater kindness for the workers of iniquity, than for pious and good men: "As for me, my foot had well nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Ver. 2.

This, he says, was a very great stumbling-block to good men, and tempted them to doubt of the providence of God: "Therefore his people return thither, and waters of a full cup Ver. 10.

are wrung out to them; and they say, Doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High?" This sentence is somewhat obscurely rendered in our translation, so as to make the sense of it difficult; which is plainly this, "Therefore his people return hither;" that is, therefore good men come to this, in the greatness of their affliction, and in the bitterness of their soul, to question God's knowledge and care of human affairs.

"Behold, (say they,) these are the ungodly, and yet they are the prosperous in the world, they increase in riches:" to what purpose is it for any man to be religious and virtuous? "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." In vain have I endeavoured after purity of heart, and innocency of life, since so little good comes of it; nay, so far from that, that I have been in continual trouble and affliction: "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." Ver. 12. Ver. 13. Ver. 14.

Such thoughts as these often came into his mind, and gave him great trouble and disquiet: but he presently corrects himself: "If I say I will speak thus, I should offend against the generation of thy children:" that is, I should go against the sense of all pious and good men, who have always believed the providence of God, notwithstanding this objection: which, at last, he tells us, he had raised on purpose to try if he could find the solution of it, "I thought to know this, which was grievous in mine eyes;" and then he resolves all into the unsearchable wisdom of the Divine Providence, which, if we fully understood from first to last, we should see good Ver. 15. Ver. 16.

reason to be satisfied with the equity of it: "When I go into the sanctuary of God, then shall I understand the end of these men: how thou did set them in slippery places," &c. This satisfied him, that whenever the secret design of God's providence should be unfolded, whether in this world or the other, how strange and cross soever things might seem to be at present, yet, in the issue and conclusion, it would appear, that neither are bad men so happy, nor good men so miserable, as at present they may seem to be.

Ver. 17, 18.

So that, upon a full debate of this matter, the Psalmist concludes that these objections against Providence do spring from our ignorance, and short and imperfect view of things; whereas, if we saw the whole design from beginning to end, it would appear to be very reasonable and regular. "Thus my heart was grieved; so foolish was I and ignorant, and as a beast before thee." And in regard to himself, he tells us, that he saw great reason to acknowledge God's tender care over him in particular, and that he could find no security or comfort for himself, but in God alone: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by thy right hand: thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory:" as if he had said, I am sensible of thy constant presence with me, and care of me; and do entirely depend upon thy guidance and direction, not doubting but that my present troubles and afflictions will have a happy and glorious issue.

Ver. 21.

Ver. 23.

And at last he breaks out into a kind of exultation and triumph, for the mighty consolation which he found in the firm belief of the being and provi-

dence of God, as the great stay and support of his soul, in the worst condition that could befal him; in the words of the text, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." If a man were to choose a happiness for himself, and were to ransack heaven and earth for it, after all his search and inquiry, he would at last fix upon God as the chief happiness of man, and the true and only rest and centre of our souls. This then is the plain meaning of the text, That nothing in the world but God can make man happy: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

That man of himself is not sufficient for his own happiness, is evident upon many accounts: because he is liable to so many evils and calamities, which he can neither prevent nor remedy. He is full of wants, which he cannot supply; compassed about with infirmities, which he can only complain of, but is not able to redress; he is obnoxious to dangers, which he must always fear, because he can never sufficiently provide against them.

Consider man by himself, and from under the conduct and protection of a superior and more powerful Being, and he is in a most disconsolate and forlorn condition; secure of nothing that he enjoys, and liable to be disappointed of every thing that he hopes for: he is apt to grieve for what he cannot help, and perhaps the justest cause of his grief is that he cannot help it; for if he could, instead of grieving for it, he would help it: he cannot refrain from desiring a great many things which he would fain have, but is never likely to obtain, because they are out of his power; and it troubles him both that they are so, and that he cannot help his being troubled at it.

"Thus man walketh in a vain show, and disquieteth himself in vain;" courting happiness in a thousand shapes, and the faster he follows it, the swifter it flies from him. Almost every thing promiseth happiness to us at a distance—such a step of honour, such a pitch of estate, such a fortune or match for a child: but when we come nearer to it, either we fall short of it, or it falls short of our expectation; and it is hard to say which of these is the greatest disappointment. Our hopes are usually bigger than enjoyment can satisfy, and an evil long feared, besides that it may never come, is many times more painful and troublesome than the evil itself, when it comes.

In a word, "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards." He comes into the world naked and unarmed, and, from himself, more destitute of the natural means of his security and support, than any other creature whatsoever, as it were on purpose to shew that he is more peculiarly the care of a superior Providence: and as man, of all the creatures of this lower world, is only made to own and acknowledge a Deity, so God, in great wisdom, hath so ordered things, that none of the other creatures should have so much need of him, and so much reason to acknowledge their necessary dependance upon him. So that the words of David are the very sense and voice of nature, declaring to us that mankind is born into the world upon terms of greater dependance upon the providence of God than other creatures: "Thou art he, (says David there to God,) that tookest me out of the womb; thou madest me to hope, (or thou didst keep me in safety,) when I was upon my mother's breasts: I was cast upon thee from the womb, thou art my God from my mother's belly: be not far from

Psal. xxii. 9, 10, 11.

me, for trouble is near:" trouble is always near to us, and therefore it is happy for us that God is never far from any of us: "for in him we live, and move, and have our being."

And when we are grown up, we are liable to a great many mischiefs and dangers, every moment of our lives; and, without the providence of God, continually insecure, not only of the good things of this life, but even of life itself: so that when we come to be men, we cannot but wonder how ever we arrived at that state, and how we have continued in it so long, considering the infinite difficulties and dangers which have continually attended us: that in running the gantlet of a long life, when so many hands have been lifted up against us, and so many strokes levelled at us, we have escaped so free, and with so few marks and scars upon us: that when we are besieged with so many dangers, and so many arrows of death are perpetually flying about us, to which we do so many ways lie open, we should yet hold our twenty, forty, sixty years, and some of us perhaps longer, and do still stand at the mark untouched, at least not dangerously wounded, by any of them: and, considering likewise this fearful and wonderful frame of a human body, this infinitely complicated engine; in which, to the due performance of the several functions and offices of life, so many strings and springs, so many receptacles and channels, are necessary, and all in their right frame and order; and in which, besides the infinite imperceptible and secret ways of mortality, there are so many sluices and flood-gates to let death in, and life out, that it is next to a miracle, though we take but little notice of it, that every one of us did not die every day since we were born: I say, considering

the nice and curious frame of our bodies, and the innumerable contingencies and hazards of human life, which is set in so slippery a place—that we still continue in the land of the living, we cannot ascribe to any thing but the watchful providence of Almighty God, "who holds our soul in life, and suffers not our foot to be moved."

To the same merciful providence of God we owe, that whilst we continue in life, we have any comfortable possession and enjoyment of ourselves, and of that which makes us men—I mean our reason and understanding: that our imagination is not let loose upon us, to haunt and torment us with melancholic freaks and fears: that we are not delivered up to the horrors of a gloomy and guilty mind: that every day we do not fall into phrensy and distraction, which, next to wickedness and vice, is the sorest calamity, and saddest disguise of human nature: I say, next to wickedness and vice, which is a wilful phrensy, a madness, not from misfortune, but from choice; whereas the other proceeds from natural and necessary causes, such as are, in a great measure, out of our power; so that we are perpetually liable to it, from any secret and sudden disorder of the brain, from the violence of a disease, or the vehement transport of any passion.

Now if things were under no government, what could hinder so many probable evils from breaking in upon us, and from treading upon the heels of one another? like the calamities of Job, when the hedge which God had set about him, and all that he had, was broken down and removed.

So that if there were no God to take care of us, we could be secure of no sort, no degree of happiness in this world, no not for one moment: and there

would be no other world for us to be happy in, and to make amends to us for all the fears and dangers, all the troubles and calamities of this present life. For God and another world stand and fall together: without him there can be no life after this, and if our hopes of happiness were only in this life, man, of all other beings in this lower world, would certainly be most miserable.

I cannot say that all the evils which I have mentioned would happen to all, if the providence of God did not rule the world; but that every man would be in danger of them all, and have nothing to support and comfort him against the fear of that danger. For the nature of man, considered by itself, is plainly insufficient for its own happiness; so that we must necessarily look abroad, and seek for it somewhere else: and who can shew us that good that is equal to all the wants and necessities, all the capacities and desires, all the fears and hopes of human nature? whatsoever can answer all these, must have these following properties.

First, It must be an all-sufficient good.

Secondly, It must be perfect goodness.

Thirdly, It must be firm and unchangeable in itself.

Fourthly, It must be such a good as none can deprive us of, and take away from us.

Fifthly, It must be eternal.

Sixthly, It must be able to support and comfort us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life.

Lastly, It must be such a good as can give perfect rest and tranquillity to our minds.

Nothing that is short of all this can make us happy: and no creature, no, not the whole creation, can

pretend to be all this to us. All these properties meet only in God, who is the perfect and supreme good; as I shall endeavour, in the following discourse, more particularly to shew; and consequently, That God is the only happiness of man.

I. First, God is an all-sufficient good. And this does import two things—wisdom to contrive our happiness, and power to effect it; for neither of these, without the other, is sufficient, and both these, in the highest and most eminent degree, are in God.

He is infinitely wise to design and contrive our happiness; because he knows what happiness is, and how to frame us so as to be capable of the happiness he designs for us; and how to order and dispose all other things so, as that they shall be no hinderance and impediment to it.

He perfectly understands all the possibilities of things, and how to fit means to any end. He knows all our wants, and how to supply them; all our hopes and desires, and how to satisfy them: he foresees all the dangers and evils which threaten us, and knows how to prevent or divert them, if he think fit; or if he permit them to come, how to support us under them, or to deliver us out of them, or to turn them to our greater benefit and advantage in the last issue and result of things.

His wisdom cannot be surprised by any accident which he did not foresee, and which he is not sufficiently provided against. The wisdom of men is but short and imperfect, and liable to infinite errors and mistakes: in many cases men know not what is safest and best for them, nor whether this or that will conduce most to their happiness: nay, it often happens that those very means which the wisest men choose for their security, do prove the occasions of

their ruin, and they are thrown down by those very ways, whereby they thought to raise and establish themselves.

Especially, if God breathe upon the counsels of men, how are their designs blasted! How are they infatuated and foiled in their deepest contrivances, and "snared in the work of their own hands!" When it is of the Lord, the wisdom of the greatest politicians is turned into foolishness: for "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord."

But the Divine wisdom, being founded upon infinite knowledge, is thereby secured against all possibility of error and mistake. God perfectly knows the natures and the powers of all his creatures, and therefore can never be mistaken in the use and application of them to any of his purposes: so that none of his designs of love and mercy to the sons of men can miscarry, for want of good contrivance, or wise conduct.

And as he is perfectly wise to contrive our happiness, so is he infinitely powerful to effect it, and to remove out of the way all the obstacles and impediments of it. We may understand many times what would conduce to our happiness, but may not be able to compass it; but nothing is out of the reach of omnipotency: many things are difficult to us, but nothing is too hard for God: many things are impossible with us, but "with God all things are possible." For he is the fountain and original of all power, from whom it is derived, and upon whom it depends, and to whom it is perfectly subject and subordinate: he can do all things at once, and in an instant, and with the greatest ease: and no created power can put any difficulty in his way,

much less make any effectual resistance; because omnipotency can check, and countermand, and bear down before it all other powers.

So that if God be on our side, who can be against us? We may safely "commit our souls into his hands, for he is able to keep that which is committed to him." He can give us all good things, and deliver us from all evil, for his is the kingdom and the glorious power. Though all creatures should fail us, we may rely upon God, and live upon his all-sufficiency for our supply; and may say, with the prophet, "Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine; though the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls; yet would I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

II. Secondly, As God is an all-sufficient good, so he is perfect goodness. He is willing to communicate happiness to us, and to employ his power and wisdom for our good. He made us that he might make us happy, and nothing can hinder us from being so but ourselves. Such is his goodness, that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth:" and when we have provoked him by our sins, "he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:" for "he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." So that if any of us be miserable, it is our own choice; if we perish, our destruction is of ourselves: for, as the wise man, in one of the apocryphal books, says excellently, "God made not death, neither hath he

pleasure in the destruction of the living; but men seek death in the error of their life, and pull destruction upon themselves with the works of their own hands."

So great is the goodness of God to mankind, that he hath omitted nothing that is necessary to our happiness. He designed it for us at first, and to that end he hath endowed us with powers and faculties whereby we are capable of knowing, and loving, and obeying, and enjoying him, the chief good. And when we had forfeited all this by the wilful transgression and disobedience of the first parents of mankind, and were miserably bruised and maimed by their fall, God of his infinite mercy was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of happiness, by sending his only Son to suffer in our nature, and in our stead; and thereby to become a "propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the author of eternal salvation to them that believe and obey him:" and he hath likewise promised to give us his Holy Spirit, to enable us to that faith and obedience which the gospel requires of us, as the necessary conditions of our eternal salvation.

III. Thirdly, God is also a firm and unchangeable good. Notwithstanding his infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness, we might be miserable if God were mutable. For that cannot be a happiness which depends upon uncertainties; and perhaps one of the greatest aggravations of misery is to fall from happiness—to have been once happy, and afterwards to cease to be so: and that would unavoidably happen to us, if the cause of our happiness could change, and the foundation of it be removed. If God could be otherwise than powerful, and wise, and good, all our hopes of hap-

piness would be shaken, and would fall to the ground. But the Divine Nature is not subject to any change: as he is "the Father of lights," and "the author of every good and perfect gift; so with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." All the things of this world are mutable; and for that reason, had they no other imperfection belonging to them, cannot make us happy.

IV. Fourthly, God is such a good as none can deprive us of and take away from us. If the things of this world were unchangeable in their nature, and not liable to any decay, yet they cannot make us happy; because we may be cheated of them by fraud, or robbed of them by violence: but God cannot be taken from us: nothing but our sins can part God and us: "Who shall separate us (saith the apostle) from the love of God? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" We may be stripped of all our worldly comforts and enjoyments by the violence of men; but none of all these can separate us from God: "I am persuaded, (as the apostle goes on with great triumph,) that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Nor any other creature:" here is a sufficient induction of particulars, and nothing left out of this catalogue but one, and that is sin, which is none of God's creatures, but our own: this indeed deliberately consented to, and wilfully continued in, will finally part God and us, and for ever hinder us from being happy.

Rom. viii. 35.

Ver. 38, 39.

But if we be careful to avoid this, which only can separate between God and us, nothing can deprive us of him: the aids and influences of his grace none can intercept nor hinder: the joys and comforts of his Holy Spirit none can take from us: all other things may leave us and forsake us: we may be debarred of our best friends, and banished from all our acquaintance; but men can send us no whither from the presence of God: our communication with heaven cannot be prevented or interrupted: our prayers and our souls will always find the way thither from the uttermost parts of the earth.

V. Fifthly, God is an eternal good: and nothing but what is so can make us happy. Man, having an immortal spirit, and being designed for an endless duration, must have a happiness proportionable: for which reason nothing in this world can make us happy, because we shall abide and remain after it; when a very few years are past and gone, and much sooner for any thing we know, all the things of this world will leave us, or else we shall be taken away from them; "but God is from everlasting to everlasting: he is the same, and his years fail not:" therefore, well might David fix his happiness upon God alone, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee: when my heart faileth, and my strength faileth, God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

VI. Sixthly, God is able to support and comfort us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life. Outward afflictions may hurt our body, but they cannot reach our soul; and so long as that remains unwounded, "the spirit

of a man can bear his infirmities." God is intimate to our souls, and hath secret ways whereby to convey the joys and comforts of his Holy Spirit into our hearts, under the bitterest afflictions and sharpest sufferings: he can enable us by his grace to "possess our souls in patience," when all other things are taken from us: when there is nothing but trouble about us, he can "give us peace and joy in believing:" when we are persecuted, afflicted, and tormented, he can give us that ravishing sight of the glories of another world, that steadfast assurance of a future blessedness, as shall quite extinguish all sense of present sufferings: how did many of the primitive Christian martyrs, in the midst of their torments, and under the very pangs of death, "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God?"

There are none of us but may happen to fall into those circumstances of danger, and of bodily pains and sufferings, as to have no hopes of relief and comfort but from God; none in all the world to trust to but him only: and in the greatest evils that can befal us in this life, he is a sure refuge and sanctuary; and, to repeat the words of the Psalmist after the text, "when our heart fails, and our strength fails, God is the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever."

Now what would any of us do in such a case, if it were not for God? human nature is liable to desperate straits and exigences: and he is not happy who is not provided against the worst that may happen. It is sad to be reduced to such a condition, as to be destitute of all comfort and hope: and yet men may be brought to that extremity, that if it were not for God, they would not know which way to

turn themselves, nor how to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable considerations under their present anguish.

All men naturally resort to God in extremity, and cry out to him for help: even the most profane and atheistical, when they are destitute of all other comfort, will run to God, and take hold of him, and cling about him. But "God hath no pleasure in fools;" in those who neglect and despise him in their prosperity, though they owe that also entirely to him; but when the evil day comes, then they lay hold of him as their only refuge: when all things go well with them, "God is not in all their thoughts;" but "in their affliction they will seek him early: then they will cry, Lord, Lord;" but "he will say to them in that day, Depart from me ye workers of iniquity, for I know you not."

Here will be the great unhappiness of such persons, that God will then appear terrible to them, so as they shall not be able, when they look up to him, to abide his frowns: and, at the same time that they are forced to acknowledge him, and to supplicate to him for mercy and forgiveness, they shall be ready to despair of it: then, those terrible threatenings of God's word will come to their minds; "Because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated

Prov. i. 24, 25, &c.

knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices: the ease of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." To which I will add that terrible passage in the prophet, concerning the perverse and obstinate Jews, "They are a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour." And men are miserable creatures indeed, when God their Maker doth abandon them, and hath so far hardened his heart against them, that he can have no pity and compassion for them.

Isa. xxvii. 11.

VII. Seventhly and lastly, which is consequent upon all the rest, God is such a good as can give perfect rest and tranquillity to our minds. And that which cannot do this, though it had all the properties beforementioned, cannot make us happy. For he is not happy who does not think himself so, whatever cause he may have to think so. Now what in reason can give us disquiet, if we do firmly believe that there is a God, and that his providence rules and governs all things for the best; and that God is all that to good men which hath now been said of him: why should not our minds be in perfect repose, when we are secure of the chief good, and have found out that which can make us happy, and is willing to make us so, if we be not wanting to ourselves, and, by our wilful obstinacy and rebellion against him, do not oppose and frustrate this design.

If a considerate man were permitted to his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself that he could possibly devise; after he had searched

heaven and earth, the result of all his wishes would be, that there were just such a Being as we must necessarily conceive God to be: nor would he choose any other friend or benefactor; any other protector for himself, or governor for the whole world, than infinite power conducted and managed by infinite wisdom and goodness; which is the true notion of a God: after all his inquiry he would come to the Psalmist's conclusion here in the text, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

Vain man is apt to seek for happiness elsewhere; but this proceeds for want of due consideration: for when all things are well weighed, and all accounts rightly cast up and adjusted, we shall at last settle in David's resolution of that great question, What is the chief good of man? "There be many," says he, "that say, Who will shew us any good?" that is, men are generally inquisitive after happiness, but greatly divided in their opinions about it: most men place it in the present enjoyments of this world, but David for his part pitches upon God, in whom he was fully convinced that the happiness of man does consist: "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us: thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased." The great joy of the men of this world is in a plentiful harvest, and the abundance of the good things of this life: but David had found that which gave more joy and gladness to his heart—the favour of God and the "light of his countenance:" this gave perfect rest and tranquillity to his mind, so that he needed not to inquire any further: for so it follows in the next words,

Psal. iv. 6, 7, 8.

"I will both lay me down in peace, and rest; for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety:" the Hebrew word signifies *confidence* or *security:* here, and no where else, his mind found rest, and was in perfect ease and security.

I shall now only make two or three inferences from this discourse, and so conclude.

First, This plainly shews us the great unreasonableness and folly of atheism, which would banish the belief of God and his providence out of the world: which, as it is most impious in respect of God, so it is most malicious to men; because it strikes at the very foundation of our happiness, and perfectly undermines it. For if there were no God, man would evidently be the most unhappy of all other beings here below; because his unhappiness would be laid in the very frame of his nature, in that which distinguishes him from all other beings below him—I mean in his reason and understanding: and he would be so much more miserable than the beasts, by how much he hath a farther reach, and a larger prospect of future evils; a quicker apprehension, and a deeper and more lasting resentment of them.

So that if any man could see reason to stagger his belief of a God, or of his providence, as I am sure there is infinite reason to the contrary; yet the belief of these things is so much for the interest, and comfort, and happiness of mankind, that a wise man would be heartily troubled to part with a principle so favourable to his quiet, and that does so exactly answer all the natural desires, and hopes, and fears of men, and is so equally calculated both for our comfort in this world, and for our happiness in the other. For when a man's thoughts have ranged

and wandered as far as they can, his mind can find no rest, no probable foundation of happiness, but God only; no other reasonable, no nor tolerable hypothesis and scheme of things for a wise man to rely upon, and to live and die by. For no other principle but this, firmly believed, and truly lived up to by an answerable practice, was ever able to support the generality of mankind, and to minister true consolation to them under the calamities of life, and the pangs of death.

And if there were not something real in the principles of religion, it is impossible that they should have so remarkable and so regular an effect to support our minds in every condition, upon so great a number of persons of different degrees of understanding, of all ranks and conditions, young and old, learned and unlearned, in so many distant places, and in all ages of the world, the records whereof are come down to us: I say, so real, and so frequent, and so regular an effect as this is, cannot with any colour of reason be ascribed either to blind chance, or mere imagination, but must have a real, and regular, and uniform cause, proportionable to so great and general an effect.

I remember that Grotius, in his excellent book of the Truth of the Christian Religion, hath this observation, That God did not intend that the principles of religion should have the utmost evidence that any thing is capable of, and such as is sufficient to answer and bear down all sorts of captious cavils and objections against it; but so much as is abundantly sufficient to satisfy a sober and impartial inquirer after truth, one that hath no other interest but to find out truth; and when he hath found it, to yield to it: if it were otherwise, and the prin-

ciples of religion were as glaring and evident as the sun-shining at noonday, as there could hardly be any virtue in such a faith, so infidelity would be next to an impossibility.

All that I would expect from any man, that shall say that he cannot see sufficient reason to believe the being and the providence of God, is this—that he would offer some other principles; that he would advance any other hypothesis and scheme of things, that is more agreeable to the common and natural notions of men, and to all appearances of things in the world; and that does bid more fairly for the comfort and happiness of mankind, than these principles of the being of a God, and of his watchful providence over the children of men, do plainly do: and till this be clearly done, the principles of religion which have generally been received by mankind, and have obtained in the world in all ages, cannot fairly be discarded, and ought not to be disturbed and put out of possession. And this, I think, puts this whole matter upon a very fair and reasonable issue, and that nothing more needs to be said concerning it.

Secondly, From what hath been said in the foregoing discourse, it naturally follows, that God is the only object of our trust and confidence; and therefore to him alone, and to no other, we ought to address all our prayers and supplications "for mercy and grace to help in time of need." But now, according to the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome, the Psalmist here puts a very odd and strange question, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" to which they must give a quite different answer from what the Psalmist plainly intended; namely, that God was the sole object of his hope

and trust, and that upon him alone he relied as his only comfort and happiness. But to this assertion of the Psalmist the church of Rome can by no means agree: they understand this matter much better than the Psalmist did; namely, that besides God, there are in heaven innumerable angels and saints, in whom we are to repose great trust and confidence, and to whom also we are to address solemn prayers and supplications, not only for temporal good things, but for the pardon of our sins, for the increase of our graces, and for eternal life: that there are in heaven particular advocates and patrons for all exigencies and occasions, against all sorts of dangers and diseases, for all graces and virtues; and, in a word, for all temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings, to whom we may apply ourselves, without troubling God and our blessed Saviour, who also is "God blessed for evermore," by presuming upon every occasion to make our immediate addresses to him: for as they would make us believe, though Abraham was ignorant of it, and David knew it not, the blessed spirits above, both angels and saints, do not only intercede with God for us for all sorts of blessings, but we may make direct and immediate addresses to them to bestow these blessings upon us: for so they do in the church of Rome; as is evident, beyond all denial, from several of their prayers in their most public and authentic liturgies.

They would indeed fain palliate this matter, by telling us, that by these direct and immediate addresses to angels and saints to bestow grace and eternal life upon them, they mean no more but only to pray to them that they would be pleased to intercede with God for these blessings to be bestowed upon them by their mediation: but if they mean no

more, why do they say more than they mean? Why do they use such expressions as, to the common sense and understanding of mankind, do signify a great deal more than they say they mean? such expressions, as they themselves do acknowledge, if they be understood according to the most obvious sense of the words, would render them guilty of flat idolatry? Especially when they know that they are charged with idolatry upon this account; and since to clear themselves of it they will not alter their prayers, they justly lie under the suspicion of it.

And yet, admitting what they say in this matter to be true, and that by these expressions in their prayers they intend no more but the solemn invocation of angels and saints, that they would intercede with God to bestow these blessings upon them for the sake of their merits, and upon their mediation: yet this surely is a great deal too much, and cannot be done without a high intrenchment upon the office of "the only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." But let them not deceive themselves; "God is not mocked: the Lord our God is a jealous God," and "he will not give his glory to another."

I have not yet instanced in the grossest part of their superstition, not to say downright idolatry, in this kind—I mean, in their most extravagant worship of the blessed Virgin and mother of our Lord; whom they blasphemously call the Queen of Heaven; and whom, by a new style, unknown to the Scriptures and primitive antiquity, they think to dignify with the modish title of Our Lady; as if that could be any addition of honour to her, whom the angel declared to be "blessed among women:" who, if she

know any thing of the follies of her worshippers here below, with what disdain and indignation do we think she hears those infinite prayers that are made to her, and that sacrilegious worship which is given her in that church, and which makes both pages of their religion; and which, for the frequency of it, both in their public and private devotions, is very much beyond what they give to God and Christ? As if there were none in heaven but she, nor any thing upon earth to be worshipped in comparison of her image.

Nay, so far have they carried this extravagant folly—and how much farther they would have carried it, had not the Reformation given a check to it, God only knows: so far, I say, have they proceeded in this folly, as, in that famous book of their devotions called Our Lady's Psalter, not only to apply to her some part of this psalm, out of which I have taken my text, beginning it thus—"How good is God to Israel, to them that worship his blessed mother!" but they have likewise profanely burlesqued, I cannot afford it a better term, this whole book of Psalms, applying to her almost the highest things that are there said concerning God and our blessed Saviour. "Hear O heavens, and give ear O earth, and be ye horribly astonished," to see the best and wisest religion in the world transformed into superstition and folly; and to see the most learned persons in that communion set themselves in good earnest to justify all these follies and absurdities, by a grave and groundless pretence to infallibility.

Thirdly and lastly, This shews us how necessary the favour of God is to every man's happiness: and there is but one way to gain his friendship and favour, by becoming holy and good as he is: then may we

rejoice and glory in God, as the Psalmist here does, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." A wicked man dreads God above all things in the world, and he has great reason to do so: "for he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity." When by sin we depart from God, we forsake our own happiness: "Salvation is far from the wicked," says David. And again, a little after the text, "They that are far from thee shall perish, but it is good for me to draw near to God." Now by holiness and goodness we draw near to Him, who alone can make us happy.

Psal. cxix. 155.

It is certainly the common interest of mankind there should be a God; because we cannot possibly be happy without him: but then it is no man's interest to be wicked, because thereby we make Him our enemy in whose favour is life, and upon whom all our hopes of happiness do depend.

To conclude: If we would have God for our happiness, we must be sure to make him our friend; and then we may promise to ourselves all those advantages which the friendship of so great and powerful a patron can give us: and there is but one way to establish a firm friendship between God and us, and that is by doing his will, and living in obedience to his laws: "Ye are my friends (saith our blessed Lord,) if ye do whatsoever I command you:" "This is the love of God, (saith St. John,) that we keep his commandments:" and to love God is the way to be made partakers of those glorious things which

God hath prepared for them that love him: "such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man:" which God of his infinite goodness grant we may all at last be made partakers of, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XLI.

[A Thanksgiving Sermon for the late Victory at Sea. Preached before the King and Queen at Whitehall, Oct. 27, 1692.]

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.—JER. ix. 23, 24.

THESE words are a message from God sent by his prophet to the people of the Jews, who trusted in their own wisdom, and might, and riches, for their safety and preservation from that destruction which, in the former part of this chapter, God hath threatened to bring upon them by the King of Babylon. To take them off from this vain confidence is this message sent to them: "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

In the handling of these words I shall abstract from the particular occasion of them, and only consider the general truth contained in them: which I shall do under these two heads:—

First, What we are not to glory in: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches."

Secondly, What it is that is matter of true glory: "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth."

I. What we are not to glory in. The text instanceth in three things which are the great idols of mankind, and in which they are very apt to pride themselves, and to place their confidence; namely, wisdom, and might, and riches. I shall consider these severally, and shew how little reason there is to glory in any of them.

1. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." This may comprehend both human knowledge, and likewise prudence in the management of affairs. We will suppose both these to be intended here by the name of wisdom—"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom;" that is, neither in the largeness and compass of his knowledge and understanding, nor in his skill and dexterity in the contrivance and conduct of human affairs; and that for these two reasons:

First, Because the highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect.

Secondly, Because when knowledge and wisdom are with much difficulty in any competent measure attained, how easily are they lost?

First, The highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect. Our ignorance doth vastly exceed our knowledge at the best. Wisdom in any tolerable degree is difficult to be attained, but perfection in it utterly to be despaired of. Where

is there to be found so strong and sound a head, as hath no soft place: so perfect, so clear an understanding, as hath no flaw, no dark water in it? How hard a matter is it to be truly wise? And yet there are so many pretenders to wisdom as would almost tempt a man to think that nothing is easier. Men do frequently murmur and repine at the unequal distribution of other things, as of health and strength, of power and riches: but if we will trust the judgment of most men concerning themselves, nothing is more equally shared among mankind than a good degree of wisdom and understanding. Many will grant others to be superior to them in other gifts of nature, as in bodily strength and stature; and in the gifts of fortune, as in riches and honour; because the difference between one man and another in these qualities is many times so gross and palpable, that nobody hath the face to deny it: but very few in comparison, unless it be in mere compliment and civility, will yield others to be wiser than themselves; and yet the difference in this also is for the most part very visible to every body but themselves.

So that true wisdom is a thing very extraordinary. Happy are they that have it: and, next to them, not those many that think they have it, but those few that are sensible of their own defects and imperfections, and know that they have it not.

And among all the kinds of wisdom none is more nice and difficult, and meets with more frequent disappointments, than that which men are most apt to pride themselves in—I mean political wisdom and prudence; because it depends upon so many contingent causes, any one of which failing the best-laid design breaks and falls in pieces: it depends upon the uncertain wills and fickle humours, the mistaken

and mutable interests of men, which are perpetually shifting from one point to another, so that nobody knows where to find them: besides an unaccountable mixture of that which the heathen called fortune, but we Christians by its true name, the providence of God; which does frequently interpose in human affairs, and loves to confound the wisdom of the wise, and to "turn their counsels into foolishness."

Of this we have a most remarkable example in Ahithophel, of whose wisdom the Scripture gives this extraordinary testimony; "That the counsel which he counselled in those days was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God: such was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom." It seems he gave very good counsel also to Absalom, and because he would not follow it, was discontented to that degree as to lay violent hands upon himself: and now who would pride himself in being so very wise as to be able to give the best counsel in the world, and yet so very weak as to make away himself, because he to whom it was given was not wise enough to take it?

The like miscarriages often happen in point of military skill and prudence. A great prince or general is sometimes so very cautious and wary, that nothing can provoke him to a battle; and then at another time, and perhaps in another element, so rash and wilful, that nothing can hinder him from fighting and being beaten: as if the two elements made the difference; and caution were great wisdom at land, and confidence and presumption great prudence at sea. But the true reason of these things lies much deeper, in the secret providence of Almighty God, who, when he pleases, can so govern and overrule both the understandings and the wills

of men, as shall best serve his own wise purpose and design.

And as the highest pitch of human wisdom is very imperfect in itself, so is it much more so in comparison with the Divine knowledge and wisdom: compared with this it is mere folly, and less than the understanding and wisdom of a child to that of the wisest man. "The foolishness of God (says St. Paul,) is wiser than men;" that is, the least grain of Divine wisdom is infinitely beyond all the wisdom of men: but in opposition to the wisdom of God, the wisdom of men is less than nothing and vanity. Let men design things never so prudently, and make them never so sure, even to the popish and French degree of infallibility; let them reckon upon it as a blow that cannot fail: yet, after all, the counsel of the Lord *that* shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure; "for there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord."

1 Cor. i. 25.

And now we ask the question which Job does, "Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" And we must answer it as he does: "Is it not to be found in the land of the living?" unless it be that one infallible point of wisdom, to which God directs every man, and of which every man is capable, viz. religion and the fear of God: "Unto man he said, Behold! the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

Job xxviii. 12.

Chap. xxviii. 13.

Job xxviii. 28.

Secondly, When knowledge and wisdom are with great difficulty in any competent measure attained, how easily are they lost? By a disease, by a blow upon the head; by a sudden and violent passion, which may disorder the strongest brain, and con-

found the clearest understanding in a moment: nay, even the excess of knowledge and wisdom, especially if attended with pride, as too often it is, is very dangerous, and does many times border upon distraction, and run into madness: like an athletic constitution and perfect state of health, which is observed by physicians to verge upon some dangerous disease, and to be a forerunner of it.

And when a man's understanding is once crazed and shattered, how are the finest notions and thoughts of the wisest man blundered and broken, perplexed and entangled! like a puzzled lump of silk; so that the man cannot draw out a thought to any length, but is forced to break it off and to begin at another end. Upon all which, and many more accounts, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," which is so very imperfect, so hard to be attained, and yet so easy to be lost.

2. "Neither let the mighty man glory in his might;" which, whether it be meant of natural strength of body, or of military force and power, how weak and imperfect is it, and how frequently foiled by an unequal strength?

If we understand it of the natural strength of men's bodies, how little reason is there to glory in that, in which so many of the creatures below us do by so many degrees excel us. In that, which may so many ways be lost; by sickness, by a maim, and by many other external accidents; and which, however, will decay of itself, and by age sink into infirmity and weakness.

And how little reason is there to glory in that, which is so frequently foiled by an unequal strength: of which Goliath is a famous instance. When he defied the host of Israel, and would needs have the

matter decided by single combat, God inspired David to accept the challenge; who, though he was nowise comparable to him in strength, and would have been nothing in his hands in close fight, yet God directed him to assail him at a distance by a weapon that was too hard for him, a stone out of a sling, which struck the giant in the forehead, and brought his unwieldy bulk down to the earth.

Or if by "might" we understand military force and power, how little likewise is that to be gloried in; considering the uncertain events of war, and how very often and remarkably the providence of God doth interpose to cast the victory on the unlikely side. It is Solomon's observation, that such are the interpositions of Divine Providence in human affairs, that the event of things is many times not at all answerable to the power and probability of second causes: "I returned," says he, "and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."

Eccles. ix. 11.

And one way, among many others, whereby the providence of God doth often interpose to decide the events of war, is by a remarkable change of the seasons and weather in favour of one side: as by sending great snows or violent rains, to hinder the early motion and march of a powerful army, to the disappointment or prejudice of some great design: by remarkable winds and storms at sea, to prevent the conjunction of a powerful fleet: and by governing all these for a long time together so visibly to the advantage of one side as utterly to defeat the well-laid design of the other. Of all which, by the great mercy and goodness of God to us, we have had the happy experience in all our late signal deliverances and victories.

And here I cannot but take notice of a passage to this purpose in the book of Job: which may deserve our more attentive regard and consideration, because I take this book to be incomparably the most ancient of all other, and much older than Moses: and yet it is written with as lively a sense of the providence of God, and as noble figures and flights of eloquence, as perhaps any book extant in the world. The passage I mean is, where God, to convince Job of his ignorance in the secrets of nature and providence, poseth him with many hard questions, and with this among the rest: "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" Job xxxviii. 22, 23. the meaning of which is, that the providence of God doth sometimes interpose to determine the events of war, by governing the seasons and the weather, and by making the snows and rains, "the winds and storms to fulfil his word," and to execute his pleasure.

Of this we have a remarkable instance in the defeat of Sisera's mighty army; against whom, in the song of Deborah, the stars are said to "have fought in their courses:" the expression is poetical, but the plain meaning of it is, that by mighty and sudden rains, which the common opinion did ascribe to a special influence of the planets, the river of Kishon, near which Sisera's army lay, was so raised and swollen, as to drown the greatest part of that huge host. So Deborah explains the fighting of the stars in their courses against Sisera: "They fought (says she) from heaven, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, the river of Kishon swept them away:" as if the stars, which were supposed by their influence to have caused those sudden and extraordinary rains,

had set themselves in battle array against Sisera and his army.

Therefore, "Let not the mighty man glory in his might;" which is so small in itself, but in opposition to God is weakness and nothing. "The weakness of God (says St. Paul) is stronger than men." All power to do mischief is but impotence, and therefore no matter of boasting: "Why boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou art able to do mischief? the goodness of God endureth continually:" the goodness of God is too hard for the pride and malice of man, and will last and hold out when that hath tired and spent itself.

Psal. lii. 1.

3. "Let not the rich man glory in his riches." In these men are apt to pride themselves: even the meanest and poorest spirits, who have nothing to be proud of but their money; when they have got good store of that together, how will they swell and strut! as if, because they are rich and increased in goods, they wanted nothing.

But we may do well to consider, that riches are things without us; not the real excellences of our nature, but the accidental ornaments of our fortune: if they descend upon us, they are the privilege of our birth, not the effect of our wisdom and industry; and those things, in the procurement whereof we had no hand, we can hardly call our own: and if they be the fruit of our own prudent industry, that is no such matter of glorying; because men of much slower understandings do commonly outdo others in diligence and drudging, their minds lying more level to the low design of being rich.

At the best riches are uncertain. "Charge them (says St. Paul) that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches,"

Men have little reason to pride themselves, or to place their confidence in that which is uncertain, and even next to that which is not; so the wise man speaks of riches: "Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, and fly as an eagle towards heaven:" Prov. xxiii. 5. he expresses it in such a manner, as if a rich man sat brooding over an estate till it was fledged and had gotten itself wings to fly away.

But that which is the most stinging consideration of all is, that many men have an evil eye upon a good estate: so that instead of being the means of our happiness, it may prove the occasion of our ruin: so the same wise man observes, "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt." Eccles. v. And it is not without example, that a very rich man hath been excepted out of a general pardon, both as to life and estate, for no other visible reason but his vast and overgrown fortune: so Solomon observes to us again: "Such are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain, which taketh away the life of the owners thereof." Prov. i. 18. And why should any man be proud of his danger, of that which one time or other may be the certain and only cause of his ruin? a man may be too rich to be forgiven a fault which would never have been prosecuted against a man of a middle fortune. For these reasons, and a great many more, "Let not the rich man glory in his riches."

II. I proceed to consider, What it is that is matter of true glory. "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the

earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

"That he understandeth and knoweth me:" here are two words used to express the thing more fully, understanding and knowledge; which seem not only to import right apprehensions of the being, and providence, and perfections of God; but likewise a lively sense of these things, and affections suitable to these apprehensions.

"That he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord;" that is, the creator and sovereign governor of the world.

"Which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth."

The best knowledge of religion, and that which is the foundation of all the rest, is, the knowledge of the Divine Nature and perfections: especially of those which are most proper for our imitation; and such are those mentioned in the text, "loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness;" which we may distinguish thus: "loving-kindness" comprehends God's milder attributes; his goodness, and mercy, and patience: "judgment" signifies his severer dealings with men, whether in the chastisement of his people, or in the remarkable punishment of great offenders for example and warning to others: "righteousness" seems to be a word of a larger signification, and to denote that universal rectitude of the Divine Nature which appears in all the administrations of his providence here below; for the text speaks of the exercise of these perfections in this world: "which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth."

Several of the perfections of the Divine Nature are incommunicable to a creature; and therefore cannot

be thought to be proposed to us for a pattern; as self-existence, independence, and all-sufficiency; the eternity and the immensity of the Divine Being; to be the original cause of all other things, and the sovereign governor of the whole world: for God only is sufficient for that; and to be a match for all the world, a *nec pluribus impar*, is not a motto fit for a mortal man. A creature may swell with pride till it burst before it can stretch itself to this pitch of power and greatness: it is an insufferable presumption, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our being, to think to resemble God in these perfections: this was the ambition of Lucifer, to ascend into heaven, and to be like the Most High.

In our imitation of God we must still keep within the station of creatures; not affecting an independency and sovereignty like God, and to be omnipotent as he is: "Hast thou an arm like God, and canst thou thunder with a voice like him?" as God himself argues with Job. Job xl. 9.

"For in these things I delight, saith the Lord." God takes pleasure to exercise these perfections himself, and to see them imitated by us; and the imitation of these Divine perfections is our perfection and glory; in comparison of which all human wisdom, and power, and riches, are so far from being matter of glory, that they are very despicable and pitiful things: knowledge and skill to devise mischief, and power to effect it, are the true nature and character of the devil and his angels; those apostate and accursed spirits, who in temper and disposition are most contrary to God, who is the rule and pattern of all perfection.

I shall only make two observations or inferences from what hath been said, and then apply the whole

discourse to the great occasion of this day; and they are these:

First, That the wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the Divine Nature.

Secondly, That the nature of God is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness.

First, That the wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the Divine Nature: upon those more especially which to us are most easy and intelligible: such as are those mentioned in the text. And this makes the knowledge of God, and of these perfections, to be so useful and so valuable: because all religion is founded in right notions of God, and of his perfections: insomuch, that Divine revelation itself does suppose these for its foundation, and can signify nothing to us unless these be first known and believed: for unless we be first firmly persuaded of the providence of God, and of his particular care of mankind, why should we suppose that he makes any revelation of his will to us? Unless it be first naturally known that God is a God of truth, what ground is there for the belief of his word? So that the principles of natural religion are the foundation of that which is revealed: and therefore nothing can in reason be admitted to be a revelation from God, which does plainly contradict his essential perfections.

Upon this principle, a great many doctrines are without more ado to be rejected, because they do plainly, and at first sight, contradict the Divine Nature and perfections. I will give a few instances, instead of many that might be given.

In virtue of this principle I cannot believe, upon

the pretended authority or infallibility of any person or church, that force is a fit argument to produce faith: no man shall ever persuade me, not the Bishop of Meaux, with all his eloquence, that prisons and tortures, dragoons and the galleys, are proper means to convince the understanding, and either Christian or human methods of converting men to the true religion.

For the same reason I cannot believe, that God would not have men to understand their public prayers, nor the lessons of Scripture which are read to them: because a lesson is something that is to be learnt, and therefore a lesson that is not to be understood is nonsense; for if it be not understood, how can it be learnt?

As little can I believe, that God, who caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for the instruction of mankind, did ever intend that they should be locked up and concealed from the people in an unknown tongue.

Least of all can I believe that doctrine of the council of Trent, that the saving efficacy of the sacraments doth depend upon the intention of the priest that administers them: which is to say, that though the people believe and live never so well, yet they may be damned by shoals, and whole parishes together, at the pleasure of the priest: and this for no other reason, but because the priest is so cross and so cruel that he will not intend to save them.

Now can any man believe this that has any tolerable notion either of the goodness or justice of God? May we not appeal to God in this as Abraham did in another case? "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? that be far from thee, to do after this manner: shall not the judge of all the earth do

right?" Much more, to destroy the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous and innocent people should lie at the mercy and will of a wicked and perverse priest, to be saved or damned by him as he thinks fit, "That be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" For, to drive the argument to the head, if this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

Thus in things which are more obscure, we should govern all our reasonings concerning God and religion, by that which is clear and unquestionable; and should with Moses lay down this for a certain principle—"All his ways are judgment, a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he:" and say with St. Paul, "Is there then unrighteousness with God? God forbid." And again, "We know that the judgment of God is according to truth."

Secondly, The other inference is that, That the nature of God is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness: and therefore nothing but our own conformity to it can make us happy. And for this reason to understand and know God is our great excellency and glory, because it is necessary to our imitation of him who is the best and happiest Being. And so far as we are from resembling God, so far are we distant from happiness, and the true temper of the blessed. For goodness is an essential ingredient of happiness; and as without goodness there can be no true majesty and greatness, so neither any true felicity and blessedness.

Now goodness is a generous disposition of mind to diffuse and communicate itself by making others to partake of our happiness, in such degrees as they are capable: for no being is so happy as it might be, that hath not the power and the pleasure to make

others happy. This surely is the highest pleasure, I had almost said pride, of a great mind.

In vain therefore do we dream of happiness in any thing without us. Happiness must be within us; the foundation of it must be laid in the inward frame and disposition of our spirits; and the very same causes and ingredients which make up the happiness of God must be found in us, though in a much inferior degree, or we cannot be happy. They understand not the nature of happiness, who hope for it upon any other terms. He who is the author and fountain of happiness cannot convey it to us by any other way, than by planting in us such dispositions of mind as are in truth a kind of participation of the Divine Nature, and by enduing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials of happiness: and a man may as soon be well without health as happy without goodness.

If a wicked man were taken up into heaven, yet if he still continue the same bad man that he was before, *cœlum non animum mutavit*, he may have changed the climate, and be gone into a far country; but because he carries himself still along with him, he will still be miserable from himself: because the man's mind is not changed all the while, which would signify a thousand times more to his happiness, than change of place, or of any outward circumstances whatever: for a bad man hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in his guilty conscience.

There is a certain kind of temper and disposition which is necessary and essential to happiness—and that is holiness and goodness, which is the very nature of God; and so far as any man departs from this temper, so far he removes himself and runs away

from happiness. And here the foundation of hell is laid, in the evil disposition of a man's own mind, which is naturally a torment to itself: and till this be cured, it is as impossible for him to be happy, as for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease; because the man's spirit is out of order, and off the hinges, and as it were tossed from its centre; and till that be set right and restored to its proper and natural state, the man will be perpetually unquiet, and can have no rest and peace within himself. "The wicked (saith the prophet,) is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest: There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:" no peace with God, no peace with his own mind; for a bad man is at perpetual discord and wars with himself: and hence, as St. James tells us, "Come wars and fightings" without us, "even from our own lusts, which war in our members."

And now that I have mentioned wars and fightings without us, this cannot but bring to mind the great and glorious occasion of this day: which gives us manifold cause of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God, for several wonderful mercies and deliverances; and, more particularly, for a most glorious victory at sea, vouchsafed to their Majesties' fleet in this last summer's expedition.

For several great mercies and deliverances: for a wonderful deliverance indeed, from a sudden invasion designed upon us by the inveterate and implacable enemies of our peace and religion; which, by the merciful providence of God, was happily and strangely prevented, when it was just upon the point of execution.

Next for the perservation of our gracious Sovereign, from that horrid and most barbarous attempt designed upon his sacred person: and from those

great and manifold dangers to which he was exposed in his late tedious expedition; and for his safe and most welcome return to us.

And, lastly, for a most glorious victory at sea: the greatest and the cheapest that ever the sun saw, from his first setting out to run his course. The opportunity indeed of this victory was through the rashness and confidence of our enemies, by the wise providence of God, put into our hands: but the improvement of this opportunity into so great and happy a victory, we owe, under God, to the matchless conduct and courage of the brave admiral, and to the invincible resolution and valour of the captains and seamen.

This great deliverance from the designed invasion, and this glorious victory, God vouchsafed to us at home, whilst his sacred Majesty was so freely hazarding his royal person abroad, in the public cause of the rights and liberties of almost all Europe.

And now what may God justly expect from us, as a meet return for his goodness to us? What, but that we should glorify him, first by offering praise and thanksgiving; and then, by ordering our conversation aright, that he may still delight to shew us his salvation.

God might have stood aloof from us in the day of our distress, and have said to us as he once did to the people of Israel, So often have I delivered you from the hands of your enemies, but ye have still provoked me more and more, "Wherefore I will deliver you no more:" he might of said of us, as he did of the same people, "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is

Judg. x. 13.

Deut. xxxii. 20.

no faith." Our resolutions and promises of better obedience are not to be trusted; all our repentance and righteousness are but as the morning cloud, and like the early dew that passeth away: nay, methinks God seems now to say to us, as he did of old to Jerusalem, "Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, and I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited."

Jer. vi. 8.

We are here met together this day to pay our solemn acknowledgments to the "God of our salvation, who hath shewed strength with his arm, and hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart:" even to him that exerciseth "loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth:" in him will we glory as our sure refuge and defence, as our mighty deliverer, and the rock of our salvation.

And now I have only to entreat your patience a little longer, whilst I apply what hath been discoursed upon this text a little more closely to the occasion of this day. I may be tedious, but I will not be long.

And blessed be God for this happy occasion: the greatest England ever had, and, in the true consequences of it, perhaps the greatest that Europe ever had, of praise and thanksgiving.

You have heard two sorts of persons described in the text by very different characters: the one, that glory in their wisdom, and might, and riches: the other, that glory in this, that they understand and know God to be the Lord, which exerciseth "loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth."

And we have seen these two characters exemplified, or rather drawn to the life, in this present age.

We who live in this western part of Christendom have seen a mighty prince, by the just permission of God, raised up to be a terror and scourge to all his neighbours: a prince, who had in perfection all the advantages mentioned in the former part of the text: and who, in the opinion of many, who had been long dazzled with his splendour and greatness, hath passed, for many years, for the most politic, and powerful, and richest monarch, that hath appeared in these parts of the world for many ages:

Who hath governed his affairs by the deepest and steadiest counsels, and the most refined wisdom of this world: a prince, mighty and powerful in his preparations for war; formidable for his vast and well-disciplined armies, and for his great naval force; and who had brought the art of war almost to that perfection, as to be able to conquer and do his business without fighting; a mystery hardly known to former ages and generations: and all this skill and strength united under one absolute will, not hampered or bound up by any restraints of law or conscience:

A prince, that commands the estates of all his subjects, and of all conquests; which hath furnished him with an almost inexhaustible treasure and revenue; and one who, if the world doth not greatly mistake him, hath sufficiently gloried in all these advantages, and even beyond the rate of a mortal man.

But not knowing God to be the Lord, which exercises "loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth;" how hath the pride of all his glory been stained by tyranny and oppression, by injustice and cruelty; by enlarging his dominions without right, and by making war upon his

neighbours without reason, or even colour of provocation? and this in a more barbarous manner than the most barbarous nations ever did; carrying fire and desolation wheresoever he went, and laying waste many and great cities without necessity, and without pity.

And now behold what a terrible rebuke the providence of God hath given to this mighty monarch, in the full career of his fortune and fury: the consideration whereof brings to my thoughts those passages in the prophet concerning old Babylon, that standing and perpetual type of the great oppressors and persecutors of God's true church and religion:

Isa. xiv. "How is the oppressor ceased? the exacter of gold ceased? he who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he who ruled the nations in anger, is himself persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest and is quiet, and breaks forth into singing: the grave beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the captains of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations; all they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we are? art thou also become like unto us? how art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground that didst weaken the nations! for thou hast said in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north," that is, upon Mount Zion; for just so the Psalmist

Ps. xlviii. 2. describes it: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north." Here the king of Babylon threatens to take Jerusalem, and to de-

molish the temple where the congregation of Israel met for the worship of the true God; "I will also sit upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north." Much in the same style with the threatenings of modern Babylon, "I will destroy the Reformation, I will extirpate the northern heresy."

And then he goes on—"I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High: yet thou shalt be brought down to the grave, to the sides of the pit: they that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, and opened not the house of his prisoners?"

God seems already to have begun this work, in the late glorious victory at sea; and I hope he will cut it short in righteousness. I have sometimes heretofore wondered, why, at the destruction of modern and mystical Babylon, the Scripture should make so express mention of great wailing and lamentation for the loss of her ships and seamen: little imagining, thirty years ago, that any of the kingdoms who had given their power to the beast, would ever have arrived to that mighty naval force: but the Scripture saith nothing in vain. Rev. xviii. 17.

Whether, and how far, success is an argument of a good cause, I shall not now debate: but thus much, I think, may safely be affirmed, that the providence of God doth sometimes, without plain and downright miracles, so visibly shew itself, that we cannot without great stupidity and obstinacy refuse to acknowledge it.

I grant, the cause must first be manifestly just, before success can be made an argument of God's favour to it and approbation of it: and if the cause of

true religion, and the necessary defence of it against a false and idolatrous worship, be a good cause, our's is so: and I do not here beg the question; we have abundantly proved it to the confusion of our adversaries. If the vindication of the common liberties of mankind against tyranny and oppression be a good cause, then our's is so: and this needs not to be proved, it is so glaringly evident to all the world. And as our cause is not like their's, so neither hath their rock been like our rock, our enemies themselves being judges.

And yet as bad an argument as success is of a good cause, I am sorry to say it, but I am afraid it is true; it is like in the conclusion to prove the best argument of all other to convince those who have so long pretended conscience against submission to the present government.

Mere success is certainly one of the worst arguments in the world of a good cause, and the most improper to satisfy conscience: and yet we find by experience, that in the issue it is the most successful of all other arguments; and does, in a very odd, but effectual way, satisfy the consciences of a great many men by shewing them their interest.

God has of late visibly made bare his arm on our behalf, though some are still so blind and obstinate that they will not see it: like those of whom the prophet complains,—"Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see, but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at thy people."

Isa. xxvi. 11.

Thus have I represented unto you a mighty monarch, who, like a fiery comet, hath hung over Europe for many years; and by his malignant influence hath made such terrible havoc and devastations in this part of the world.

Let us now turn our view to the other part of the

text, and behold a greater than he is here: a prince of a quite different character, who does understand and know God to be the Lord which doth "exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth;" and who hath made it the great study and endeavour of his life to imitate these Divine perfections, as far as the imperfection of human nature in this mortal state will admit: I say, a greater than he is here, who never said or did an insolent thing; but, instead of despising his enemies, has upon all occasions encountered them with an undaunted spirit and resolution.

This is the man whom God hath honoured to give a check to this mighty man of the earth, and to put a hook into the nostrils of this great leviathan, who has so long had his pastime in the seas.

But we will not insult, as he once did in a most unprincely manner over a man much better than himself, when he believed him to have been slain at the Boyne: and indeed death came then as near to him as was possible without killing him; but the merciful providence of God was pleased to step in for his preservation, almost by a miracle: for I do not believe that, from the first use of great guns to that day, any mortal man ever had his shoulder so kindly kissed by a cannon bullet.

But I will not trespass any further upon that which is the great ornament of all his other virtues; though I have said nothing of him but what all the world does see and must acknowledge: he is as much above being flattered as it is beneath an honest and generous mind to flatter.

Let us then glory in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of our salvation: let us now in the presence of all his people pay our most thankful acknowledgments to Him "who is worthy to be praised; even

to the Lord God of Israel, who alone doth wondrous things:" who "giveth victory unto kings, and hath preserved our David his servant from the hurtful sword."

And let us humbly beseech Almighty God that he would long preserve to us the valuable blessing of our two excellent princes, whom the providence of God hath sent amongst us, like two good angels; not to rescue two or three persons, but almost a whole nation out of Sodom: by saving us I hope at last from our vices, as well as at first from that vengeance, which was just ready to have been poured down upon us.

Two sovereign princes reigning together, and in the same throne; and yet so entirely one, as perhaps no nation, no age, can furnish us with a parallel: two princes perfectly united in the same design of promoting the true religion, and the public welfare, by reforming our manners, and, as far as is possible, by repairing the breaches, and healing the divisions of a miserably distracted church and nation: in a word, two princes who are contented to sacrifice themselves and their whole time to the care of the public: and for the sake of that to deny themselves almost all sorts of ease and pleasure: to deny themselves, did I say? no, they have wisely and judiciously chosen the truest and highest pleasure that this world knows—the pleasure of doing good, and being benefactors to mankind. May they have a long and a happy reign over us, to make us happy, and to lay up in store for themselves a happiness without measure, and without end, in God's glorious and everlasting kingdom; for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XLII.

[Preached before the King and Queen at Whitehall, Feb. 25, 1693—4.]

AGAINST EVIL SPEAKING.

To speak evil of no man.—TIT. iii. 2.

GENERAL persuasives to repentance and a good life, and invectives against sin and wickedness at large, are certainly of good use to recommend religion and virtue, and to expose the deformity and danger of a vicious course. But it must be acknowledged, on the other hand, that these general discourses do not so immediately tend to reform the lives of men: because they fall among the crowd, but not touch the consciences of particular persons in so sensible and awakening a manner, as when we treat of particular duties and sins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice of the one, and to reclaim them from the other, by proper arguments taken from the word of God, and from the nature of particular virtues and vices.

The general way is, as if a physician, instead of applying particular remedies to the distemper of his patient, should entertain him with a long discourse of diseases in general, and of the pleasure and advantages of health, and earnestly persuade him to be well, without taking his particular disease into consideration, and prescribing remedies for it.

But if we would effectually reform men, we must take to task the great and common disorders of their lives, and represent their faults to them in such

a manner, as may convince them of the evil and danger of them, and put them upon the endeavour of a cure.

And to this end I have pitched upon one of the common and reigning vices of the age, calumny and evil speaking; by which men contract so much guilt to themselves, and create so much trouble to others; and from which, it is to be feared, few or none are wholly free. For "Who is he (saith the son of Si-

Eccl. xix. 16. rach) that hath not offended with his

Jam. iii. 2. tongue?" "In many things (saith St. James) we offend all: and if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."

But how few have attained to this perfection: and yet, unless we do endeavour after it, and in some good measure attain it, all our pretence to religion is vain:

Jam. i. 26. so the same apostle tells us, "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain."

For the more distinct handling of this argument, I shall reduce my discourse to these five heads:

First, I shall consider the nature of this vice, and wherein it consists.

Secondly, I shall consider the due extent of this prohibition, "To speak evil of no man."

Thirdly, I shall shew the evil of this practice, both in the causes and effects of it.

Fourthly, I shall add some farther considerations to dissuade men from it.

Fifthly, I shall give some rules and directions for the prevention and cure of it.

I. I shall consider what this sin or vice of evil speaking, here forbidden by the apostle, is: μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, not to defame and slander any man, not

to hurt his reputation, as the etymology of the word doth import. So that this vice consists in saying things of others which tend to their disparagement and reproach, to the taking away or lessening of their reputation and good name. And this, whether the things said be true or not. If they be false, and we know it, then it is downright calumny, and if we do not know it, but take it upon the report of others, it is however a slander; and so much the more injurious, because really groundless and undeserved.

If the thing be true, and we know it to be so, yet it is a defamation, and tends to the prejudice of our neighbour's reputation: and it is a fault to say the evil of others which is true, unless there be some good reason for it besides: because it is contrary to that charity and goodness which Christianity requires, to divulge the faults of others, though they be really guilty of them, without necessity, or some other very good reason for it.

Again, it is evil speaking and the vice condemned in the text, whether we be the first authors of an ill report, or relate it from others: because the man that is evil spoken of is equally defamed either way.

Again, whether we speak evil of a man to his face, or behind his back: the former way indeed seems to be the more generous, but yet is a great fault, and that which we call reviling: the latter is more mean and base, and that which we properly call slander or backbiting.

And, lastly, whether it be done directly and in express terms, or more obscurely and by way of oblique insinuation; whether by way of downright reproach, or with some crafty preface of commendation: for so it have the effect to defame, the manner of address does not much alter the case: the one may be more

dexterous, but is not one jot less faulty; for many times the deepest wounds are given by these smoother and more artificial ways of slander: as by asking questions, "Have you not heard so and so of such a man? I say no more; I only ask the question:" or by general intimations, that—they are loath to say what they have heard of such an one, are very sorry for, and do not at all believe it—if you will believe them: and this many times without telling the thing, but leaving you in the dark to suspect the worst.

These and such-like arts, though they may seem to be tenderer and gentler ways of using men's reputation, yet in truth they are the most malicious and effectual methods of slander; because they insinuate something that is much worse than is said, and yet are very apt to create in unwary men a strong belief of something that is very bad, though they know not what it is. So that it matters not in what fashion a slander is dressed up; if it tend to defame a man, and to diminish his reputation, it is the sin forbidden in the text.

II. We will consider the extent of this prohibition, "To speak evil of no man;" and the due bounds and limitations of it. For it is not to be understood absolutely, to forbid us to say any thing concerning others that is bad. This in some cases may be necessary and our duty, and in several cases very fit and reasonable. The question is, In what cases, by the general rules of Scripture and right reason, we are warranted to say the evil of others that is true?

In general, we are not to do this without great reason and necessity; as for the prevention of some great evil, or the procuring of some considerable good to ourselves, or others. And this I take to be the meaning of that advice of the son of Sirach:

"Whether it be to a friend or a foe, talk not of other men's lives; and if thou canst without offence, reveal them not;" that is, if without hurt to any body thou canst conceal them, divulge them not. Eccl. xix. 8.

But because this may not be direction sufficient, I shall instance in some of the principal cases wherein men are warranted to speak evil of others, and yet in so doing, do not offend against this prohibition in the text.

First, It is not only lawful, but very commendable, and many times our duty, to do this in order to the probable amendment of the person of whom evil is spoken. In such a case we may tell a man of his faults privately: or, where it may not be so fit for us to use that boldness and freedom, we may reveal his faults to one who is more fit and proper to reprove him, and will probably make no other use of this discovery but in order to his amendment. And this is so far from being a breach of charity, that it is one of the best testimonies of it: for perhaps the party may not be guilty of what hath been reported of him, and then it is a kindness to give him the opportunity of vindicating himself; or, if he be guilty, perhaps being privately and prudently told of it he may reform. In this case the son of Sirach adviseth to reveal men's faults: "Admonish a friend (says he); it may be he hath not done it; and if he have done it, that he do it no more: admonish a friend, it may be he hath not said it; and if he have, that he speak it not again: admonish a friend, for many times it is a slander; and believe not every tale." Eccl. xix. 13, 14, 15.

But then we must take care that this be done out of kindness, and that nothing of our own passion be

mingled with it: and that under pretence of reproving and reforming men, we do not reproach and revile them, and tell them of their faults in such a manner, as if we did not shew our authority rather than our charity. It requires a great deal of address and gentle application so to manage the business of reproof, as not to irritate and exasperate the person whom we reprove instead of curing him.

Secondly, This likewise is not only lawful, but our duty, when we are legally called to bear witness concerning the fault and crime of another. A good man would not be an accuser, unless the public good, or the prevention of some great evil, should require it; and then the plain reason of the thing will sufficiently justify a voluntary accusation: otherwise it hath always among well-mannered people been esteemed very odious for a man to be officious in this kind, and a forward informer concerning the misdemeanours of others. Magistrates may sometimes think it fit to give encouragement to such persons, and to set one bad man to catch another, because such men are fittest for such dirty work; but they can never inwardly approve them, nor will they ever make them their friends and confidants.

But when a man is called to give testimony in this kind in obedience to the laws, and out of reverence to the oath taken in such cases, he is so far from deserving blame for so doing, that it would be an unpardonable fault in him to conceal the truth, or any part of it.

Thirdly, It is lawful to publish the faults of others, in our own necessary defence and vindication. When a man cannot conceal another's faults without betraying his own innocency, no charity requires a man to suffer himself to be defamed to save the reputa-

tion of another man. Charity begins at home; and though a man had never so much goodness, he would first secure his own good name, and then be concerned for other men's. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves; so that the love of ourselves is the rule and measure of our love to our neighbour: and therefore first, otherwise it could not be the rule. And it would be very well for the world, if our charity would rise thus high; and no man would hurt another man's reputation, but where his own is in real danger.

Fourthly, This also is lawful for caution and warning to a third person, that is in danger to be infected by the company or ill example of another; or may be greatly prejudiced, by reposing too much confidence in him, having no knowledge or suspicion of his bad qualities: but even in this case we ought to take great care, that the ill character we give of any man be spread no further than is necessary to the good end we designed in it.

Besides these more obvious and remarkable cases, this prohibition doth not I think hinder, but that in ordinary conversation men may mention that ill of others which is already made as public as it well can be; or that one friend may not in freedom speak to another of the miscarriage of a third person, where he is secure no ill use will be made of it, and that it will go no further to his prejudice: provided always, that we take no delight in hearing or speaking ill of others: and the less we do it, though without any malice or design of harm, still the better; because this shews that we do not feed upon ill reports and take pleasure in them.

These are all the usual cases in which it may be necessary for us to speak evil of other men. And

these are so evidently reasonable, that the prohibition in the text cannot with reason be extended to them. And if no man would allow himself to say any thing to the prejudice of another man's good name, but in these and the like cases, the tongues of men would be very innocent, and the world would be very quiet. I proceed, in the

III. Third place, To consider the evil of this practice, both in the causes and the consequences of it.

First, We will consider the causes of it. And it commonly springs from one or more of these evil roots.

First, One of the deepest and most common causes of evil speaking is ill-nature and cruelty of disposition: and by a general mistake ill-nature passeth for wit, as cunning doth for wisdom; though in truth they are nothing akin to one another, but as far distant as vice and virtue.

And there is no greater evidence of the bad temper of mankind, than the general proneness of men to this vice. For (as our Saviour says) "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And therefore men do commonly incline to the censorious and uncharitable side; which shews human nature to be strangely distorted from it's original rectitude and innocency. The wit of man doth more naturally vent itself in satire and censure, than in praise and panegyric. When men set themselves to commend, it comes hardly from them, and not without great force and straining; and if any thing be fitly said in that kind, it doth hardly relish with most men: but in the way of invective, the invention of men is a plentiful and never-failing spring; and this kind of wit is not more easy than it is acceptable: it is greedily entertained and greatly applauded, and every man is

glad to hear others abused, not considering how soon it may come to his own turn to lie down and make sport for others.

To speak evil of others, is almost become the general entertainment of all companies: and the great and serious business of most meetings and visits, after the necessary ceremonies and compliments are over, is to sit down and backbite all the world. It is the sauce of conversation, and all discourse is counted but flat and dull which hath not something of piquancy and sharpness in it against somebody. For men generally love rather to hear evil of others than good, and are secretly pleased with ill reports, and drink them in with greediness and delight: though at the same time they have so much justice as to hate those that propagate them; and so much wit, as to conclude, that these very persons will do the same for them in another place and company.

But especially if it concerns one of another party, and that differs from us in matters of religion; in this case, all parties seem to be agreed that they do God great service in blasting the reputation of their adversaries. And though they all pretend to be Christians, and the disciples of him who taught nothing but kindness and meekness and charity; yet it is strange to see with what a savage and murderous disposition they will fly at one another's reputation, and tear it in pieces: and, whatever other scruples they may have, they make none to bespatter one another in the most bitter and slanderous manner.

But if they hear any good of their adversaries, with what nicety and caution do they receive it: how many objections do they raise against it; and with what coldness do they at last admit it. "It is

very well, (say they,) if it be true: I shall be glad to hear it confirmed. I never heard so much good of him before. You are a good man yourself, but have a care you be not deceived."

Nay, it is well, if, to balance the matter, and set things even, they do not clap some infirmity and fault into the other scale, that so the enemy may not go off with flying colours.

But, on the other side, every man is a good and substantial author of an ill report. I do not apply this to any one sort of men, though all are to blame in this way; *Iliacos intra muros peccatur, et extra.* To speak impartially, the zealots of all parties have got a scurvy trick of lying for the truth.

But, of all sorts of people, I have observed the priests and bigots of the church of Rome to be the ablest in this way, and to have the strongest faith for a lusty falsehood and calumny. Others will bandy a false report, and toss it from one hand to another; but I never knew any that would so hug a lie, and be so very fond of it. They seem to be described by St. John in that expression in the Revelation, "whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

Another shrewd sign that ill-nature lies at the root of this vice is, that we easily forget the good that is said of others, and seldom make mention of it; but the contrary sticks with us, and lies uppermost in our memories, and is ready to come out upon all occasions: and which is yet more ill-natured and unjust, many times when we do not believe it ourselves, we tell it to others, with this charitable caution—that we hope it is not true: but in the mean time we give it our pass, and venture it to take its fortune to be believed or not, according to the charity of those into whose hands it comes.

Secondly, Another cause of the commonness of this vice is, that many are so bad themselves in one kind or other. For to think and speak ill of others is not only a bad thing, but a sign of a bad man. Our blessed Saviour, speaking of the evil of the last days, gives this as the reason of the great decay of charity among men; "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matt. xxiv. 12. When men are bad themselves, they are glad of any opportunity to censure others, and are always apt to suspect that evil of other men which they know by themselves. They cannot have a good opinion of themselves, and therefore are very unwilling to have so of any body else; and for this reason they endeavour to bring men to a level, hoping it will be some justification of them if they can but render others as bad as themselves.

Thirdly, Another source of this vice is malice and revenge. When men are in heat and passion, they do not consider what is true, but what is spiteful and mischievous; and speak evil of others in revenge of some injury which they have received from them; and when they are blinded by their passions, they lay about them madly and at a venture, not much caring whether the evil they speak be true or not. Nay, many are so devilish, as to invent and raise false reports on purpose to blast men's reputation. This is a diabolical temper, and therefore St. James tells us, that the slanderous "tongue is set on fire of hell: and the devil hath his very name from calumny and false accusation: and it is his nature too, for he is always ready to stir up and foment this evil spirit among men: nay, the Scripture tells us, that he hath the malice and impudence to accuse good men before God; as he did Job, charging him

with hypocrisy to God himself who he knows does know the hearts of all the children of men.

Fourthly, Another cause of evil-speaking is envy. Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others, and think that their reputation obscures them, and that their commendable qualities do stand in their light; and therefore they do what they can to cast a cloud over them, that the bright shining of their virtues may not scorch them. This makes them greedily to entertain, and industriously to publish, any thing that may serve to that purpose, thereby to raise themselves upon the ruins of other men's reputation: and therefore, as soon as they have got an ill report of any good man by the end, to work they presently go to send it abroad by the first post: for the string is always ready upon their bow to let fly this arrow with an incredible swiftness, through city and country, for fear the innocent man's justification should overtake it.

Fifthly, Another cause of evil-speaking is impertinence and curiosity; an itch of talking and meddling in the affairs of other men, which do no wise concern them. Some persons love to mingle themselves in all business, and are loth to seem ignorant of so important a piece of news as the faults and follies of men, or any bad thing that is talked of in good company. And therefore they do with great care pick up ill stories, as good matter of discourse in the next company that is worthy of them: and this perhaps not out of any great malice, but for want of something better to talk of, and because their parts lie chiefly that way.

Lastly, Men do this many times out of wantonness and for diversion. So little do light and vain men consider, that a man's reputation is too great

and tender a concernment to be jested withal: and that a slanderous tongue bites like a serpent, and wounds like a sword. For what can be more barbarous, next to sporting with a man's life, than to play with his honour and reputation, which to some men is dearer to them than their lives?

It is a cruel pleasure which some men take in worrying the reputation of others much better than themselves, and this only to divert themselves and the company. Solomon compares this sort of men to distracted persons: "As a madman, (saith he,) who casteth fire-brands, arrows and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour:" the LXX render it, "so is the man that defameth his neighbour, and saith, Am I not in sport?" Such and so bad are the causes of this vice. I proceed to consider, in the

Second place, The ordinary, but very pernicious consequences and effects of it, both to others and to ourselves.

First, To others; the parties I mean that are slandered. To them it is certainly a great injury, and commonly a high provocation, but always matter of no small grief and trouble to them.

It is certainly a great injury, and if the evil which we say of them be not true, it is an injury beyond imagination, and beyond all possible reparation. And though we should do our utmost endeavour afterwards towards their vindication, yet that makes but very little amends; because the vindication seldom reacheth so far as the reproach, and because commonly men are neither so forward to spread the vindication, nor is it so easily received, after ill impressions are once made. The solicitous vindication of a man's self is at the best but an after-game; and, for the most part, a man had better sit

still, than to run the hazard of making the matter worse by playing it.

I will add one thing more—that it is an injury that descends to a man's children and posterity; because the good or ill name of the father is derived down to them; and many times the best thing he hath to leave them is the reputation of his unblemished virtue and worth: and do we make no conscience to rob his innocent children of the best part of this small patrimony, and of all the kindness that would have been done them for their father's sake, if his reputation had not been so undeservedly stained? Is it no crime by the breath of our mouth at once to blast a man's reputation, and to ruin his children, perhaps to all posterity? Can we make a jest of so serious a matter? Of an injury so very hard to be repented of as it ought, because in such a case no repentance will be acceptable without restitution, if it be in our power. And perhaps it will undo us in this world to make it; and if we do it not, will be our ruin in the other.

I will put the case at the best, that the matter of the slander is true; yet no man's reputation is considerably stained, though never so deservedly, without great harm and damage to him. And it is great odds but the matter by passing through several hands is aggravated beyond truth, every one out of his bounty being apt to add something to it.

But besides the injury, it is commonly a very high provocation. And the consequence of that may be as bad as we can imagine, and may end in dangerous and desperate quarrels. This reason the wise son of Sirach gives why we should defame no man: "Whether it be (says he) to a friend or a foe, talk not of other men's

Ecclus. xix. 8, 9.

lives. For he hath heard and observed thee;" that is, one way or other it will probably come to his knowledge, "and when the time cometh, he will shew his hatred;" that is, he will take the first opportunity to revenge it.

At the best, it is always matter of grief to the person that is defamed: and Christianity, which is the best-natured institution in the world, forbids us the doing of those things whereby we may grieve one another. A man's good name is a tender thing, and a wound there sinks deep into the spirit even of a wise and good man: and the more innocent any man is in this kind, the more sensible is he of this hard usage; because he never treats others so, nor is he conscious to himself that he hath deserved it.

Secondly, The consequences of this vice are as bad or worse to ourselves. Whoever is wont to speak evil of others, gives a bad character of himself, even to those whom he desires to please; who, if they be wise enough, will conclude that he speaks of them to others, as he does of others to them: and were it not for that fond partiality which men have for themselves, no man could be so blind as not to see this.

And it is very well worthy of our consideration, which our Saviour says in this very case, "That with what measure we mete to others, it shall be measured to us again;" and that many times heaped up and running over. For there is hardly any thing wherein mankind do use more strict justice and equality, than in rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing. Matth. vii.

Nay, revenge often goes further than words. A reproachful and slanderous speech hath cost many a man a duel, and in that the loss of his own life, or

the murder of another, perhaps with the loss of his own soul: and I have often wondered that among Christians this matter is no more laid to heart.

And though neither of these great mischiefs should happen to us, yet this may be inconvenient enough many other ways. For no man knows in the chance of things, and the mutability of human affairs, whose kindness and good-will he may come to stand in need of before he dies. So that did a man only consult his own safety and quiet, he ought to refrain from evil-speaking. "What man is he, (saith the Psalmist,) that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good: keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood."

Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13.

But there is an infinitely greater danger hanging over us from God. If we allow ourselves in this evil practice, all our religion is good for nothing. So St. James expressly tells us: "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain." St. Paul puts slanderers and revilers amongst those that shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And our blessed Saviour hath told us, that "by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned." To which I will add the counsel given us by the wise man: "Refrain your tongue from backbiting; for there is no word so secret that shall go for nought, and the mouth that slandereth slayeth the soul." I proceed, in the

James i. 26.

1 Cor. vi. 10.

Wisdom of Solomon, i. v. 11.

Fourth place, To add some further argument and considerations to take men off from this vice: as,

First, That the use of speech is a peculiar prero-

gative of man above other creatures, and bestowed upon him for some excellent end and purpose: that by this faculty we might communicate our thoughts more easily to one another, and consult together for our mutual comfort and benefit: not to enable us to be hurtful and injurious, but helpful and beneficial, to one another. The Psalmist, as by interpreters is generally thought, calls our tongue our glory; "therewith we praise God and bless men." Now to bless is to speak well of any, and to wish them well. So that we pervert the use of speech, and turn our glory into shame, when we abuse this faculty to the injury and reproach of any.

Secondly, Consider how cheap a kindness it is to speak well, at least not to speak ill of any. A good word is an easy obligation, but not to speak ill requires only our silence, which costs us nothing. Some instances of charity are chargeable, as to relieve the wants and necessities of others: the expense deters many from this kind of charity. But were a man never so covetous, he might afford another man his good word; at least he might refrain from speaking ill of him; especially if it be considered how dear many have paid for a slanderous and reproachful word.

Thirdly, Consider that no quality doth ordinarily recommend one more to the favour and good-will of men, than to be free from this vice. Every one desires such a man's friendship, and is apt to repose such a great trust and confidence in him: and when he is dead, men will praise him; and, next to piety towards God, and righteousness to men, nothing is thought a more significant commendation, than that he was never, or very rarely, heard to speak ill of any. It was a singular character of a Roman

gentleman, *Nescivit quid esset male dicere*, "He knew not what it was to give any man an ill word."

Fourthly, Let every man lay his hand upon his heart, and consider how himself is apt to be affected with this usage. Speak thy conscience man, and say whether, as bad as thou art, thou wouldst not be glad to have every man's, especially every good man's, good word? and to have thy faults concealed, and not to be hardly spoken of, though it may be not altogether without truth, by those whom thou didst never offend by word or deed? but with what face or reason dost thou expect this from others, to whom thy carriage hath been so contrary? nothing surely is more equal and reasonable than that known rule, —what thou wouldst have no man do to thee, that do thou to no man.

Fifthly, When you are going to speak reproachfully of others, consider whether you do not lie open to just reproach in the same, or some other kind. Therefore give no occasion, no example, of this barbarous usage of one another.

There are very few so innocent and free either from infirmities or greater faults, as not to be obnoxious to reproach upon one account or other; even the wisest, and most virtuous, and most perfect among men, who have some little vanity, or affectation, which lays them open to the raillery of a mimical and malicious wit: therefore we should often turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and look into that part of the wallet which men commonly fling over their shoulders, and keep behind them, that they may not see their own faults: and when we have searched that well, let us remember our Saviour's rule, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone."

Lastly, Consider, that it is in many cases as great a charity to conceal the evil you hear and know of others, as if you relieved them in a great necessity. And we think him a hard-hearted man that will not bestow a small alms upon one in great want. It is an excellent advice which the son of Sirach gives to this purpose; "Talk not of other men's lives: if thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee; and be bold it will not burst thee." I shall, in the Ecclus. xix. 10.

Fifth and last place, Give some rules and directions for the prevention and cure of this great evil among men.

First, Never say any evil of any man, but what you certainly know. Whenever you positively accuse and indict any man of any crime, though it be in private and among friends, speak as if you were upon your oath; because God sees and hears you. This not only charity, but justice, and regard to truth, do demand of us. He that easily credits an ill report is almost as faulty as the first inventor of it. For though you do not make, yet you commonly propagate, a lie. Therefore never speak evil of any upon common fame, which for the most part is false, but almost always uncertain, whether it be true or not.

Not but that it is a fault, in most cases, to report the evil of men which is true, and which we certainly know to be so: but if I cannot prevail to make men wholly to abstain from this fault, I would be glad to compound with some persons, and to give this point of them however; because it will retrench nine parts in ten of the evil-speaking that is in the world.

Secondly, Before you speak evil of any man, consider whether he hath not obliged you by some real kindness, and then it is a bad return to speak ill of

him who hath done us good. Consider also, whether you may not come hereafter to be acquainted with him, related to him, or obliged by him whom you have thus injured? and how will you then be ashamed when you reflect upon it, and perhaps have reason also to believe, that he to whom you have done this injury is not ignorant of it?

Consider, likewise, whether, in the chance of human affairs, you may not some time or other come to stand in need of his favour; and how incapable this carriage of your's towards him will render you of it? and whether it may not be in his power to revenge a spiteful and needless word by a shrewd turn? so that, if a man made no conscience of hurting others, yet he should in prudence have some consideration of himself.

Thirdly, Let us accustom ourselves to pity the faults of men, and to be truly sorry for them, and then we shall take no pleasure in publishing them. And this common humanity requires of us, considering the great infirmities of human nature, and that we ourselves also are liable to be tempted: considering, likewise, how severe a punishment every fault and miscarriage is to itself; and how terribly it exposeth a man to the wrath of God, both in this world and the other. He is not a good christian, that is not heartily sorry for the faults even of his greatest enemies; and, if he be so, he will discover them no further than is necessary to some good end.

Fourthly, Whenever we hear any man evil spoken of, if we know any good of him let us say that. It is always the more humane and the more honourable part to stand up in defence and vindication of others, than to accuse and bespatter them. Possibly the good you may have heard of them may not be true,

but it is much more probable that the evil which you have heard of them is not true neither: however, it is better to preserve the credit of a bad man, than to stain the reputation of the innocent. And if there were any need that a man should be evil spoken of, it is but fair and equal that his good and bad qualities should be mentioned together; otherwise, he may be strangely misrepresented, and an indifferent man may be made a monster.

They that will observe nothing in a wise man, but his oversights and follies, nothing in a good man but his failings and infirmities, may make a shift to render a very wise and good man very despicable. If one should heap together all the passionate speeches, all the froward and imprudent actions of the best man, all that he has said or done amiss in his whole life, and present it all at one view, concealing his wisdom and virtues; the man in this disguise would look like a madman or a fury: and yet if his life were fairly represented, and just in the same manner it was led; and his many and great virtues set over against his failings and infirmities, he would appear to all the world to be an admirable and excellent person. But how many and great soever any man's ill qualities are, it is but just, that with all this heavy load of faults he should have the due praise of the few real virtues that are in him.

Fifthly, That you may not speak ill of any, do not delight to hear ill of them. Give no countenance to busy bodies, and those that love to talk of other men's faults: or if you cannot decently reprove them, because of their quality, then divert the discourse some other way; or if you cannot do that, by seeming not to mind it, you may sufficiently signify that you do not like it.

Sixthly, Let every man mind himself and his own duty and concernment. Do but endeavour in good earnest to mend thyself, and it will be work enough for one man, and leave thee but little time to talk of others. When Plato withdrew from the court of Dionysius, who would fain have had a famous philosopher for his flatterer, they parted in some unkindness, and Dionysius bade him not to speak ill of him when he was returned into Greece. Plato told him, he had no leisure for it; meaning, that he had better things to mind, than to take up his thoughts and talk with the faults of so bad a man, so notoriously known to all the world.

Lastly, Let us set a watch before the door of our lips, and not to speak but upon consideration: I do not mean to speak finely, but fitly. Especially when thou speakest of others, consider of whom and what thou art going to speak: use great caution and circumspection in this matter: look well about thee; on every side of the thing, and on every person in the company, before thy words slip from thee; which, when they are once out of thy lips, are for ever out of thy power.

Not that men should be sullen in company, and say nothing; or so stiff in conversation, as to drop nothing but aphorisms and oracles: especially among equals and friends, we should not be so reserved as if we would have it taken for a mighty favour that we vouchsafe to say any thing. If a man had the understanding of an angel, he must be contented to abase something of this excess of wisdom, for fear of being thought cunning. The true art of conversation, if any body can hit upon it, seems to be this: an appearing freedom and openness, with a resolute reservedness as little appearing as is possible.

All that I mean by this caution is, that we should consider well what we say, especially of others. And to this end we should endeavour to get our minds furnished with matter of discourse concerning things useful in themselves, and not hurtful to others. And if we have but a mind wise enough, and good enough, we may easily find a field large enough, for innocent conversation: such as will harm nobody, and yet be acceptable enough to the better and wiser part of mankind: and why should any one be at the cost of playing the fool to gratify any body whatsoever?

I have done with the five things I propounded to speak to upon this argument. But because hardly any thing can be so clear, but something may be said against it; nor any thing so bad, but something may be pleaded in excuse for it, I shall therefore take notice of two or three pleas that may be made for it.

First, Some pretend mighty injury and provocation. If in the same kind, it seems thou art sensible of it; and therefore thou of all men oughtest to abstain from it: but in what kind soever it be, the christian religion forbids revenge. Therefore do not plead one sin in excuse of another, and make revenge an apology for reviling.

Secondly, It is alleged by others, with a little better grace, that if this doctrine were practised, conversation would be spoiled, and there would not be matter enough for pleasant discourse and entertainment.

I answer, the design of this discourse is to redress a great evil in conversation, and that I hope which mends it will not spoil it. And, however, if men's tongues lay a little more still, and most of us spake a

great deal less than we do, both of ourselves and others, I see no great harm in it: I hope we might for all that live comfortably and in good health, and see many good days. David, I am sure, prescribes it as an excellent receipt, in his opinion, for a quiet and cheerful, and long life, to refrain from evil-speaking: "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood."

Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13.

But granting that there is some pleasure in invective, I hope there is a great deal more in innocence: and the more any man considers this, the truer he will find it; and whenever we are serious, we ourselves cannot but acknowledge it. When a man examines himself impartially before the sacrament, or is put in mind upon a death-bed to make reparation for injuries done in this kind, he will then certainly be of this mind, and wish he had not done them. For this certainly is one necessary qualification for the blessed sacrament, that we "be in love and charity with our neighbours;" with which temper of mind this quality is utterly inconsistent.

Thirdly, There is yet a more specious plea than either of the former, that men will be encouraged to do ill if they can escape the tongues of men; as they would do, if this doctrine did effectually take place: because by this means one great restraint from doing evil would be taken away, which these good men, who are so bent upon reforming the world, think would be great pity. For many who will venture upon the displeasure of God, will yet abstain from doing bad things for fear of reproach from men: besides that this seems the most proper punishment of many faults the laws of men can take no notice of.

Admitting all this to be true, yet it does not seem so good and laudable a way to punish one fault by another: but let no man encourage himself in an evil way with this hope, that he shall escape the censure of men: when I have said all I can, there will, I fear, be evil speaking enough in the world to chastise them that do ill: and though we should hold our peace, there will be bad tongues enough to reproach men with their evil doings. I wish we could but be persuaded to make the experiment for a little while, whether men would not be sufficiently lashed for their faults though we sat by and said nothing.

So that there is no need at all that good men should be concerned in this odious work. There will always be offenders and malefactors enough to be the executioners to inflict this punishment upon one another. Therefore let no man presume upon impunity on the one hand; and, on the other, let no man despair but that this business will be sufficiently done one way or other. I am very much mistaken, if we may not safely trust an ill-natured world that there will be no failure of justice in this kind.

And here, if I durst, I would have said a word or two concerning that more public sort of obloquy, by lampoons and libels, so much in fashion in this witty age. But I have no mind to provoke a very terrible sort of men. Yet thus much I hope may be said without offence, that how much soever men are pleased to see others abused in this kind, yet it is always grievous when it comes to their own turn: however, I cannot but hope that every man that impartially considers, must own it to be a fault of a very high nature, to revile those whom God hath placed in authority over us, and to slander the footsteps of the Lord's anointed: especially since it

is so expressly written, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the rulers of thy people."

Having represented the great evil of this vice, it might not now be improper to say something to those who suffer by it. Are we guilty of the evil said of us; let us reform, and cut off all occasions for the future; and so turn the malice of our enemies to our own advantage, and defeat their ill intentions by making so good an use of it: and then it will be well for us to be evil spoken of.

Are we innocent? we may so much the better bear it patiently: imitating herein the pattern of our blessed Saviour, "who when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

We may consider, likewise, that though it be a misfortune to be evil spoken of, it is their fault that do it, and not our's, and therefore should not put us into passion: because another man's being injurious to me is no good reason why I should be uneasy to myself. We should not revenge the injuries done to us, no not upon them that do them, much less upon ourselves. Let no man's provocation make thee to lose thy patience. Be not such a fool as to part with any one virtue, because some men are so malicious as to endeavour to rob thee of the reputation of all the rest. When men speak ill of thee, do as Plato said he would do in that case, "Live so, as that nobody may believe them."

All that now remains is to reflect upon what hath been said, and to urge you and myself to do accordingly. For all is nothing, if we do not practise what we so plainly see to be our duty. Many are so taken up with the deep points and mysteries of religion, that they never think of the common duties and of-

fices of human life. But faith and a good life are so far from clashing with one another, that the christian religion hath made them inseparable. True faith is necessary in order to a good life, and a good life is the genuine product of a right belief; and therefore the one never ought to be pressed to the prejudice of the other.

I foresee what will be said, because I have heard it so often said in the like case, that there is " not one word of Jesus Christ in all this." No more is there in the text. And yet I hope that Jesus Christ is truly preached, whenever his will and laws, and the duties enjoined by the christian religion, are inculcated upon us.

But some men are pleased to say, that this is mere morality: I answer, that this is scripture morality, and christian morality, and who hath any thing to say against that? Nay, I shall go yet farther, that no man ought to pretend to believe the christian religion, who lives in the neglect of so plain a duty; and in the practice of a sin so clearly condemned by it, as this of evil-speaking is.

But because the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, yea, sharper than any calumny itself; and pierceth the very hearts and consciences of men, laying us open to ourselves, and convincing us of our more secret as well as of our more visible faults; I shall therefore at one view represent to you what is dispersedly said concerning this sin in the holy word of God.

And I have purposely reserved this to the last, because it is more persuasive and penetrating than any human discourse. And to this end be pleased to consider in what company the Holy Ghost doth usually mention this sin. There is scarce any black

catalogue of sins in the Bible but we find this among them; in the company of the very worst actions and most irregular passions of men. "Out of the heart, (says our Saviour,) proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, false-witness, evil-speakings." And the apostle ranks backbiters with fornicators and murderers, and haters of God; and with those, of whom it is expressly said, that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Matth. xv. 19.

Rom. i. 29, 30.

1 Cor. vi. 10.

And when he enumerates the sins of the last times, "Men (says he) shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, evil-speakers, without natural affection, perfidious, false accusers," &c. And which is the strangest of all, they who are said to be guilty of these great vices and enormities are noted by the apostle to be great pretenders to religion; for so it follows in the next words, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." So that it is no new thing for men to make a more than ordinary profession of Christianity, and yet at the same time to live in a most palpable contradiction to the precepts of that holy religion: as if any pretence to mystery, and I know not what extraordinary attainments in the knowledge of Christ, could exempt men from obedience to his laws, and set them above the virtues of a good life.

2 Tim. iii. 2, 3.

And now, after all this, do we hardly think that to be a sin, which is in Scripture so frequently ranked with murder and adultery, and the blackest crimes; such as are inconsistent with the life and power of religion, and will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of God? Do we believe the Bible to be the word of God! and can we allow ourselves in the

common practice of a sin, than which there is hardly any fault of men's lives more frequently mentioned, more severely reproved, and more odiously branded in that holy book?

Consider seriously these texts: "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." Have ye never heard what our Saviour says; that of every idle word we must give an account in the day of judgment; that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned?" What can be more severe than that of St. James? "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain." Psal. xv. 1.

To conclude: the sin, which I have now warned men against, is plainly condemned by the word of God: and the duty, which I have now been persuading you to, is easy for every man to understand, not hard for any man, that can but resolve to keep a good guard upon himself for some time, by the grace of God to practise; and most reasonable for all men, but especially for all Christians, to observe. It is as easy as a resolute silence upon just occasion, as reasonable as prudence and justice and charity, and the preservation of peace and good-will among men, can make it; and of as necessary and indispensable an obligation, as the authority of God can render any thing.

Upon all which considerations let every one of us be persuaded to take up David's deliberate resolution: "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue." Psal. xxxix. 1.
And I do verily believe, that would we but heartily

endeavour to amend this one fault, we should soon be better men in our whole lives: I mean, that the correcting of this vice, together with those that are nearly allied to it, and may at the same time, and almost with the same resolution and care, be corrected, would make us owners of a great many considerable virtues, and carry us on a good way towards perfection; it being hardly to be imagined, that a man that makes conscience of his words should not take an equal or a greater care of his actions. And this I take to be both the true meaning and the true reason of that saying of St. James, and with which I shall conclude: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, to do his will; working in you always that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

CONCERNING THE

DIVINITY AND INCARNATION

OF

OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR.

AN

ADVERTISEMENT

TO

THE READER.

THE following Sermons were preached several years ago, in the church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, in London; and being now revised and enlarged by the Author are here made public; the true reason whereof, was, not that which is commonly alleged for printing books—the importunity of friends; but the importunate clamours and malicious calumnies of others, whom the Author heartily prays God to forgive, and to give them better minds; and to grant, that the ensuing discourses, the publication whereof was in so great a degree necessary, may by his blessing prove in some measure useful.

SERMON XLIII.

[Preached in the Church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, Dec. 30, 1679.]

CONCERNING THE DIVINITY OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.—JOHN i. 14.

THESE words contain in them three great points concerning our blessed Saviour, the author and founder of our faith and religion.

First, His incarnation, "The Word was made," or became, "flesh."

Secondly, His life and conversation here among us, "and dwelt amongst us;" ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, he pitched his tabernacle amongst us; he lived here below in this world, and for a time made his residence and abode with us.

Thirdly, That in this state of his humiliation he gave great and clear evidence of his Divinity; whilst he appeared as a man and lived amongst us, there were great and glorious testimonies given of him that he was the Son of God; and that in so peculiar a manner as no creature can be said to be: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," &c.

I shall begin with the first of these, his incarnation, as most proper for this solemn time, which hath for many ages been set apart for the com-

memoration of the nativity and incarnation of our blessed Saviour. "The Word was made flesh;" that is, he who is personally called the Word, and whom the evangelist St. John had so fully described in the beginning of the Gospel, he became flesh; that is, assumed our nature and became man: for so the word flesh is frequently used in Scripture for man, or human nature: "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come;" that is, to thee shall all men address their supplications. Again, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;" that is, all men shall behold and acknowledge it; and then it follows, "All flesh is grass," speaking of the frailty and mortality of man. And so likewise in the New Testament, our blessed Saviour, foretelling the misery that was coming upon the Jewish nation, says, "Except those days should be shortened no flesh should be saved;" that is, no man should escape and survive that great calamity and destruction which was coming upon them: "By the works of the law (says the apostle) shall no flesh," that is, no man "be justified."

Psal. lxv. 2.

Isa. xl. 5, 6.

Mat. xxiv. 22.

Gal. ii. 16.

So that by the Word's being made, or becoming flesh, the evangelist did not intend that he assumed only a human body without a soul, and was united only to a human body, which was the heresy of Apollinaris and his followers; but that he became man, that is, assumed the whole human nature, body and soul. And it is likewise very probable, that the evangelist did purposely choose the word flesh, which signifies the frail and mortal part of man, to denote to us, that the Son of God did assume our nature with all its infirmities, and became sub-

ject to the common frailty and mortality of human nature.

The words thus explained contain that great mystery of godliness, as the apostle calls it, or of the christian religion, viz. The incarnation of the Son of God, which St. Paul expresseth by the appearance or manifestation of God in the flesh: And "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness—God was manifested in the flesh;" that is, he appeared in human nature, he became man; or, as St. John expresseth it in the text, "the Word was made flesh." 1 Tim. iii. 16.

But, for the more clear and full explication of these words, we will consider these two things:

First, The person that is here spoken of, and who is said to be incarnate, or to be made flesh, namely, the Word.

Secondly, The mystery itself, or the nature of this incarnation, so far as the Scripture hath revealed and declared it to us.

I. We will consider the person that is here spoken of, and who is said to be incarnate or to be made flesh, and who is so frequently in this chapter called by the name or title of the Word; namely, the eternal and only begotten Son of God; for so we find him described in the text. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," &c. that is, such as became so great and glorious a person as deserves the title of the only begotten Son of God.

For the explaining of this name or title of the Word, given by St. John to our blessed Saviour, we will consider these two things:

First, The reason of this name or title of the Word;

and what probably might be the occasion why this evangelist insists so much upon it, and makes so frequent mention of it.

Secondly, The description itself, which is given of him under this name or title of the Word by this evangelist in his entrance into his history of the Gospel.

1. We will inquire into the reason of this name or title of the Word, which is here given to our blessed Saviour by this evangelist: and what might probably be the occasion why he insists so much upon it, and makes so frequent mention of it. I shall consider these two things distinctly and severally.

First, The reason of this name or title of the Word, here given by the evangelist to our blessed Saviour. And he seems to have done it in compliance with the common way of speaking among the Jews, who frequently call the Messias by the name of the Word of the Lord; of which I might give many instances: but there is one very remarkable, in the Targum of Jonathan, which renders those words of the Psalmist, which the Jews acknowledge to be spoken of the Messias, viz. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand," &c. I say, it renders them thus, "The Lord said unto his Word, Sit thou on my right hand," &c. And so likewise Philo the Jew calls him "by whom God made the world, the Word of God, and the Son of God:" and Plato probably had the same notion from the Jews, which made Amelius, the Platonist, when he read the beginning of St. John's Gospel, to say, "This barbarian agrees with Plato, ranking the Word in the order of principles;" meaning, that he made the Word the principle or efficient cause of the world, as Plato also hath done.

And this title of the Word was so famously known to be given to the Messias, that even the enemies of Christianity took notice of it. Julian the Apostate calls Christ by this name: and Mahomet in his Alcoran gives this name of the Word to Jesus the son of Mary. But St. John had probably no reference to Plato, any otherwise than as the Gnostics, against whom he wrote, made use of several of Plato's words and notions. So that in all probability St. John gives our blessed Saviour this title with regard to the Jews more especially, who anciently called the Messias by this name.

Secondly, We will in the next place consider, what might probably be the occasion why this evangelist makes so frequent mention of this title of the Word, and insists so much upon it. And it seems to be this: nay, I think that hardly any doubt can be made of it, since the most ancient of the fathers, who lived nearest the time of St. John, do confirm it to us.

St. John, who survived all the apostles, lived to see those heresies which sprang up in the beginnings of Christianity, during the lives of the apostles, grown up to a great height, to the great prejudice and disturbance of the christian religion; I mean the heresies of Ebion and Cerinthus, and the several sects of the Gnostics, which began from Simon Magus, and were continued and carried on by Valentinus and Basilides, Carpocrates and Menander: some of which expressly denied the Divinity of our Saviour, asserting him to have been a mere man, and to have had no manner of existence before he was born of the blessed virgin, as Eusebius and Epiphanius tells us particularly concerning Ebion: which those who hold the same opinion now in our days,

may do well to consider from whence it had its original.

Others of them, I still mean the Gnostics, had corrupted the simplicity of the christian doctrine by mingling with it the fancies and conceits of the Jewish Cabbalists, and of the schools of Pythagoras and Plato, and of the Chaldean philosophy, more ancient than either; as may be seen in *Eusebius de præparat. Evan.* and by jumbling all these together they had framed a confused genealogy of deities, which they call by several glorious names, and all of them by the general name of Æons or Ages: among which they reckoned Σωὴ, and Λογος, and Μονογενης, and Πλήρωμα; that is, the life, and the word, and the only begotten, and the fulness, and many other Divine powers and emanations, which they fancied to be successively derived from one another.

And they also distinguished between the Maker of the world, whom they called the God of the Old Testament, and the God of the New: and between Jesus and Christ. Jesus, according to the doctrine of Cerinthus, as Irenæus tells us, being the man that was born of the virgin, and Christ, or the Messias, being that Divine Power or Spirit which afterwards descended into Jesus, and dwelt in him.

If it were possible, yet it would be to no purpose, to go about to reconcile these wild conceits with one another; and to find out for what reason they were invented, unless it were to amuse the people with these high swelling words of vanity, and a pretence of knowledge, falsely so called, as the apostle speaks in allusion to the name of Gnostics; that is to say, the men of knowledge, which they proudly assumed to themselves, as if the knowledge of mysteries of a more sublime nature did peculiarly belong to them.

In opposition to all these vain and groundless conceits, St. John in the beginning of his Gospel chooses to speak of our blessed Saviour, the history of whose life and death he was going to write, by the name or title of the Word—a term very famous among those sects; and shews, that this Word of God, which was also the title the Jews anciently gave to the Messias, did exist before he assumed a human nature, and even from all eternity; and that to this eternal Word did truly belong all those titles which they kept such a canting stir about, and which they did with so much senseless nicety and subtilty distinguish from one another, as if they had been so many several emanations from the Deity: and he shews that this word of God was really and truly the life, and the light, and the fulness, and the only begotten of the Father. Ver. 5, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men;" and, ver. 6, "and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not;" and, ver. 7, 8, 9, where the evangelist, speaking of John the Baptist, says of him, that "he came for a witness to bear witness of the light; and that he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light: and that light was the true light which coming into the world enlightens every man:" and, ver. 14; "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth:" and, ver 16; "and of his fulness we all receive," &c. You see here is a perpetual allusion to the glorious titles which they gave to their Æons, as if they had been so many several deities.

In short, the evangelist shews that all his fanciful genealogy of Divine emanations, with which the Gnostics make so great a noise, was mere conceit and imagination; and that all these glorious titles

did really meet in the Messias, who is the Word, and who before his incarnation was from all eternity with God, partaker of his Divine nature and glory.

I have declared this the more fully and particularly, because the knowledge of it seems to me to be the only true key to the interpretation of this discourse of St. John, concerning our Saviour under the name and title of the Word. And surely it is a quite wrong way for any man to go about by the mere strength and subtilty of his reason and wit, though never so great, to interpret an ancient book, without understanding and considering the historical occasion of it, which is the only thing that can give true light to it.

And this was the great and fatal mistake of Socinus, to go to interpret scripture merely by criticizing upon words, and searching into all the senses that they are possibly capable of, till he can find one, though never so forced and foreign, that will save harmless the opinion which he was beforehand resolved to maintain, even against the most natural and obvious sense of the text which he undertakes to interpret: just as if a man should interpret ancient statutes and records by mere critical skill in words, without regard to the true occasion upon which they were made, and without any manner of knowledge and insight into the history of the age in which they were written.

I shall now proceed to the second thing which I proposed to consider, namely,

II. The description here given of the Word by this evangelist in his entrance into his history of the Gospel. "In the beginning (says he) was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God: all things

were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

In which passage of the evangelist four things are said of the Word, which will require a more particular explication.

First, That "he was in the beginning."

Secondly, That "he was in the beginning with God."

Thirdly, That "he was God."

Fourthly, That "all things were made by him."

1st. That "he was in the beginning," ἐν ἀρχῇ, which is the same with ἀπ' αρχῆς, from the beginning, where speaking of Christ by the name of Eternal Life, and of the Word of Life, that (says he) "which was from the beginning." Nonnus, the ancient paraphrast of St. John's Gospel, by way of explication of what is meant by his being "in the beginning," adds, that he was ἄχρονος, without time, that is, before all time; and, if so, then he was from all eternity: "In the beginning was the Word," that is, when things began to be made he was; not then began to be, but then already was, and did exist before any thing was made, and consequently is without beginning; for that which was never made could have no beginning of its being: and so the Jews used to describe eternity, "before the world was," and "before the foundation of the world;" as also in several places of the New Testament. And so likewise Solomon describes the eternity of Wisdom: "The Lord (says he) possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old: I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When he prepared the heaven I was there; then I was with him as one brought up with

John i. 1.

Prov. viii. 22, 23, &c.

him, rejoicing always before him; and so Justin Martyr explains this very expression of St. John, that he was or had a being before all ages: so likewise Athenagoras, a most ancient Christian writer: "God, (says he) who is an invisible mind, had from the beginning the Word in himself."

2dly, That "in the beginning the Word was with God:" and so Solomon, when he would express the eternity of Wisdom, says, "it was with God:" and so likewise the son of Sirach, speaking of Wisdom, says, it was μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, "with God;" and so the ancient Jews often called the Word of God, the "Word which is before the Lord," that is, with him, or in his presence: in like manner the evangelist says here, that the "Word was with God," that is, it was always together with, partaking of his happiness and glory: to which our Saviour refers in his prayer:

John xvii. 5. "Glorify me with thine ownself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." And this being with God the evangelist opposeth to his appearing and being manifested to the world. (Ver. 10.) "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not;" that is, he, who from all eternity was with God, appeared in the world, and when he did so, though he had made the world, yet the world would not own him. And this opposition between his being with God and his being manifested in the world, the same St. John mentions elsewhere: "I shew unto

1 John i. 2. you that eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

3dly, That "he was God:" and so Justin Martyr says of him, that "he was God before the world," that is, from all eternity: but then the evangelist adds, by way of explication, "the same was in the begin-

ning with God;" that is, though the Word was truly and really God, yet he was not God the Father, who is the Fountain of the Deity; but an emanation from him, the only begotten Son of God, from all eternity with him; to denote to us, that which is commonly called by divines, and for any thing I could ever see properly enough, the distinction of persons in the Deity: at least we know not a fitter word whereby to express that great mystery.

4thly, That "all things were made by him." This seems to refer to the description which Moses makes of the creation, where God is represented creating things by his Word: "God said, Let there be light, and there was light:" and so likewise the Psalmist: "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth:" and so St. Peter also expresseth the creation of the world: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were of old, and the earth made out of water:" and in the ancient books of the Chaldeans, and the verses ascribed to Orpheus, the Maker of the world is called the Word, and the Divine Word: and so Tertullian tells the pagans, that by their philosophers the Maker of the world was called λόγος, the Word, or Reason: and Philo the Jew, following Plato, who himself most probably had it from the Jews, says, that the world was created by the Word; whom he calls the Name of God, and the Son of God: two of which glorious titles are ascribed to him, together with that of Maker of the world, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "In these last days (says he) God hath spoken to us by his Son, by whom also he made the worlds: who is the brightness of his glory, and

Gen. i.

Psal. xxxiii. 6.

2 Pet. iii. 5.

the express image of his person:" and to the same purpose St. Paul, speaking of Christ, calls him the " image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature;" that is, born before any thing was created; as does evidently follow from the reason given in the next words why he called him " the first-born of every creature; for by him were all things created that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible; all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things subsist:" from whence it is plain, that by his being " the first-born of every creature" thus much at least is to be understood, that he was before all creatures, and therefore he himself cannot be a creature, unless he could be before himself: nay, the apostle says it expressly in this very text in which he is called the " first-born of every creature," or of the whole creation, that " he is before all things;" that is, he had a being before there was any created being, he was before all creatures both in duration and in dignity; for so must he of necessity be, if " all things were made by him:" for as the maker is always before the thing which is made, so is he also better and of greater dignity.

Col. i. 15, 16, 17.

And yet I must acknowledge, that there seems to be no small difficulty in the interpretation I have given of this expression, in which Christ is said by the apostle to be the " first-born of every creature," or of the whole creation; because in strictness of speech the " first-born" is of the same nature with those in respect of whom he is said to be the " first-born:" and, if so, then he must be a creature as well as those in respect of whom he is said to be the first-born. This is the objection in its full strength, and I do own it to have a very plausible

appearance: and yet I hope before I have done, to satisfy any one that will consider things impartially, and without prejudice, and will duly attend to the scope of the apostle's reasoning in this text, and compare it with other parallel places of the New Testament, that it neither is, nor can be, the apostle's meaning, in affirming Christ to be the "first-born of every creature," to insinuate, that the Son of God is a creature.

For how can this possibly agree with that which follows, and is given as the reason why Christ is said to be the "first-born of every creature?" namely, because "all things were made by him:" the apostle's words are these: "the first-born of every creature," or of the whole creation; for by him all things were created: but now, according to the Socinian interpretation, this would be a reason just the contrary way: for if "all things were created by him," then he himself is not a creature.

So that the apostle's meaning in this expression must either be, that the Son of God, our blessed Saviour, was before all creatures, as it is said presently after that "he is before all things;" and then the reason which is added will be very proper and pertinent, "he is before all things," because "all things were created by him:" in which sense it is very probable that the Son of God elsewhere calls himself the "beginning of the creation of God," Rev. iii. 14. meaning by it, as the philosophers most frequently use the word ἀρχὴ, the principle or efficient cause of the creation: and so we find the same word, which our translation renders "the beginning," used together with the word "first-born," as if they were of the same importance; "the beginning and first-born from the dead;" that is, the Col. i. 18.

principle and efficient cause of the resurrection of the dead.

Or else, which seems to me to be the most probable, and indeed the true meaning of the expression, by this title of the "first-born of every creature," the apostle means, that he was Lord and Heir of the creation; for the first-born is natural heir: and Justinian tells us, that Heir did anciently signify Lord: and therefore the Scripture uses these terms promiscuously, and as if they were equivalent: for whereas St. Peter says of Jesus Christ, that "he is Lord of all." St. Paul calls him "Heir of all things:" and then the reason given by the apostle why he calls him "first-born of every creature" will be very fit and proper, because "all things were created by him:" for well may he be said to be Lord and Heir of the creation, who "made all things that were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made."

Acts x. 36.

Rom. iv. 13.

And this will yet appear much more evident, if we consider, that the apostle to the Hebrews, (who, by several of the ancients, was thought to be St. Paul, where he gives to Christ some of the very same titles which St. Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians had done, calling him, "the image of God," and "the Maker of the world") does, instead of the title of the "first-born of every creature," call him "the heir of all things;" and then adds, as the reason of this title, that by him God made the worlds: "God (says he) hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath constituted heir of all things; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power," &c. Which is exactly parallel with that passage of St. Paul to the Colossians,

where Christ is called " the image of the invisible God," and where it is likewise said of him, that he made all things, and that " by him all things do subsist," which the apostle to the Hebrews, in different words, but to the very same sense, expresseth by his " upholding all things by the Word of his power;" that is, by the same powerful Word by which all things at first were made: but then, instead of calling him " the first-born of every creature," because " all things were made by him," he calls him the " Heir of all things, by whom God also made the worlds."

And indeed that expression of " the first-born of every creature" cannot admit of any other sense which will agree so well with the reason that follows as the sense which I have mentioned; namely, that he is therefore Heir and Lord of the whole creation, because " all creatures were made by him;" which exactly answers those words of the apostle to the Hebrews, " whom he hath constituted heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

And now I appeal to any sober and considerate man, whether the interpretation which I have given of that expression of the " first-born of every creature," be not much more agreeable, both to the tenor of the Scripture, and to the plain scope and design of the apostle's argument and reasoning in that text.

I have insisted the longer upon this, because it is the great text upon which the Arians lay the main strength and stress of their opinion, that the Son of God is a creature, because he is said by the apostle to be " the first-born of every creature;" by which expression, if no more be meant than that he is Heir and Lord of the whole creation, which I have shewed to be very agreeable both to the use of the word " first-born" among the Hebrews, and like-

wise to the description given of Christ in that parallel text which I cited out of the Epistle to the Hebrews, then this expression of the "first-born of every creature" is nothing at all to the purpose, either of the Arians or the Socinians, to prove the Son of God to be a creature: besides, that the interpretation which I have given of it makes the apostle's sense much more current and easy; for then the text will run thus: who is the image of the invisible God, Heir and Lord of the whole creation, for by him all things were made.

So that in these four expressions of the evangelist, which I have explained, there are these four things distinctly affirmed of the Word.

First, That "he was in the beginning;" that is, that he already was and did exist when things began to be created: he was before any thing was made, and consequently is without any beginning of time; for that which was never made, could have no beginning of its being.

Secondly, That in that state of his existence before the creation of the world he was partaker of the Divine glory and happiness: and this I have shewed to be the meaning of that expression, "and the Word was with God:" for thus our blessed Saviour does explain his being with God before the world was. "And now, O Father, glorify me with thy own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

Thirdly, That he was God; and the Word was God. Not God the Father, who is the principle and fountain of the Deity: to prevent that mistake, after he had said that the Word was God, he immediately adds in the next verse, "the same was in the beginning with God:" he was God by

participation of the Divine nature and happiness together with the Father, and by way of derivation from him, as the light is from the sun: which is the common illustration which the ancient fathers of the christian church give us of this mystery, and is perhaps the best and fittest that can be given of it. For among finite beings it is not to be expected, because not possible, to find any exact resemblance of that which is infinite, and consequently incomprehensible; because whatever is infinite is for that reason incomprehensible by a finite understanding, which is too short and shallow to measure that which is infinite; and whoever attempts it will soon find himself out of his depth.

Fourthly, That "all things were made by him:" which could not have been more emphatically expressed than it is here by the evangelist, after the manner of the Hebrews, who, when they would say a thing with the greatest force and certainty, are wont to express it both affirmatively and negatively; as, "he shall live and not die;" that is, he shall most assuredly live: so here, "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made;" that is, He made all creatures without exception, and consequently, he himself is not a creature, because it is evidently impossible that any thing should ever make itself: but then, if he be, and yet was never made, it is certainly true, that he always was, even from all eternity.

All these assertions are plainly and expressly contained in this description which the evangelist St. John here makes of the Word: and this according to the interpretation of these expressions by the unanimous consent of the most ancient writers of the christian church: who, some of them, had the

advantage of receiving it from the immediate disciples of St. John: which surely is no small prejudice against any newly-invented and contrary interpretation; as I shall hereafter more fully shew, when I come to consider the strange and extravagant interpretation, which the Socinians make of this passage of St. John; which is plain enough of itself, if they under a pretence of explaining and making it more clear had not disturbed and darkened it.

Now from this description, which the evangelist here gives of the Word, and which I have so largely explained in the following discourse, these three corollaries or conclusions do necessarily follow.

First, That the Word here described by St. John is not a creature. This conclusion is directly against the Arians, who affirmed, that the Son of God was a creature. They grant indeed that he is the first of all the creatures both in dignity and duration; for so they understand that expression of the apostle, wherein he is called "the first-born of every creature." But this I have endeavoured already to shew not to be the meaning of that expression.

They grant him indeed to have been God's agent or instrument in the creation of the world, and that all other creatures besides himself were made by him: but still they contend that he is a creature, and was made. Now this cannot possibly consist with what St. John says of him, that "he was in the beginning;" that is, as hath been already shewn, before any thing was made: and likewise, because he is said to have made all things, and that "without him was not any thing made that was made;" and therefore he himself who made all things is necessarily excepted out of the condition or rank of a crea-

ture; as the apostle reasons in another case: "He hath put all things under his feet; but when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest, that he is excepted, who did put all things under him." In like manner, "if by him all things were made, and without him was not any thing made that was made," then either he was not made, or he must make himself, which involves in it a plain contradiction.

Secondly, That this Word was from all eternity: for if he "was in the beginning;" that is, before any thing was made, he must of necessity always have been; because whatever is, must either have been sometime made, or must always have been; for that which was not, and afterwards is, must be made. And this will likewise follow from his being said to be God, and that in the most strict and proper sense; which doth necessarily imply his eternity, because God cannot begin to be, but must of necessity always have been.

Thirdly, From both these it will undeniably follow, that he had an existence before his incarnation, and his being born of the blessed virgin. For if he "was in the beginning," that is, from all eternity, which I have shewn to be the meaning of that expression, then certainly he was before his being born of the blessed virgin. And this likewise is implied in the proposition in the text: "And the Word was made flesh," viz. that Word which the evangelist had before so gloriously described; that Word which "was in the beginning, and was with God, and was God," and "by whom all things were made;" I say, that Word was incarnate, and assumed a human nature, and therefore must necessarily exist, and have a being, before he could assume humanity into an union with his Divinity.

And this proposition is directly levelled against the Socinians, who affirm our blessed Saviour to be a mere man, and that he had no existence before he was born of the virgin Mary, his mother: which assertion of theirs does perfectly contradict all the former conclusions which have been drawn from the description here given by St. John of the Word. And their interpretation of this passage of St. John applying it to the beginning of the publication of the Gospel, and to the new creation or reformation of the world by Jesus Christ, doth likewise contradict the interpretation of this passage constantly received, not only by the ancient fathers, but even by the general consent of all Christians for fifteen hundred years together, as I shall hereafter plainly shew: for to establish this their opinion, that our blessed Saviour was a mere man, and had no existence before his birth, they are forced to interpret this whole passage in the beginning of St. John's Gospel quite to another sense, never mentioned, nor I believe thought of by any christian writer whatsoever before Socinus: and it is not easy to imagine, how any opinion can be loaded with a greater and heavier prejudice than this is.

And this I should now take into consideration, and shew, besides the novelty of this interpretation, and the great violence and unreasonableness of it, the utter inconsistency of it with other plain texts of the New Testament.

But this is wholly matter of controversy, and will require a large discourse by itself. I shall therefore waive the further prosecution of it at present, and apply myself to that which is more practical and proper for the occasion of this season: so that at present I have done with the first thing contained in the

first part of the text, viz. The person here spoken of, who is said to be incarnate, namely, the Word, it was He that "was made flesh."

I should then have proceeded to the second thing which I proposed to consider, viz. The mystery itself, or the nature of this incarnation, so far as the Scripture hath revealed and declared it to us, namely, by assuming our nature in such a manner as that the Divinity became united to a human soul and body. Bnt this I have already endeavoured in some measure to explain, and shall do it more fully in some of the following discourses upon this text. I shall now only make a short and useful reflection upon it with relation to the solemnity of this time.

And it shall be to stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great love of God to mankind in the mystery of our redemption, by the incarnation of the Word, "the only begotten Son of God:" that he should deign to have such a regard to us in our low condition, and to take our case so much to heart, as to think of redeeming and saving mankind from that depth of misery into which we had plunged ourselves; and to do this in so wonderful and astonishing a manner: that God should employ his eternal and only begotten Son, who had been with him from all eternity partaker of his happiness and glory, and was God of God, to save the sons of men by so infinite and amazing a condescension: that God should vouchsafe to become man, to reconcile man to God: that he should come down from heaven to earth, to raise us from earth to heaven: that he should assume our vile, and frail, and mortal nature, that he might clothe us with glory, and honour, and immortality: that he should suffer death to save us

from hell, and shed his blood to purchase eternal redemption for us.

For certainly the greater the person is that was employed in this merciful design, so much the greater is the condescension, and the love and goodness expressed in it so much the more admirable: that the Son of God should stoop from the height of glory and happiness to the lowest degree of abasement, and to the very depth of misery for our sakes, who were so mean and inconsiderable, so guilty and obnoxious to the severity of justice, so altogether unworthy of his grace and favour, and so very unwilling to receive it when it was so freely offered to us; for, as the evangelist here tells us, "He came to his own, and his own received him not:" to his own creatures, and they did not own and acknowledge their Maker; to his own nation and kindred, and they despised him, and esteemed him not. Lord! what is man that God should be so mindful of him; or the son of man, that the Son of God should come down from heaven to visit him, in so much humility and condescension, and with so much kindness and compassion.

Blessed God and Saviour of mankind! what shall we render to thee for such mighty love, for such inestimable benefits as thou hast purchased for us, and art ready to confer upon us? What shall we say to thee, O thou preserver and lover of souls, so often as we approach thy holy table, there to commemorate this mighty love of thine to us, and to partake of those invaluable blessings which by thy precious blood-shedding thou hast obtained for us? So often as we there remember, that thou wast pleased to assume our mortal nature, on purpose to live amongst us for our instruction, and for our ex-

ample, and to lay down thy life for the redemption of our souls, and for the expiation of our sins; and to take part of flesh and blood that thou mightest shed it for our sakes: what affections should these thoughts raise in us! What vows and resolutions should they engage us in, of perpetual love and gratitude, and obedience to thee, the most gracious and most glorious redeemer of mankind!

And with what religious solemnity should we, more especially at this time, celebrate the incarnation and birth of the Son of God, by giving praise and glory to God in the highest, and by all possible demonstration of charity and good-will to men! And as he was pleased to assume our nature, so should we, especially at this season, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, sincerely embrace and practise his religion, making no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof: and now that the Sun of Righteousness is risen upon the world, we should walk as children of the light, and demean ourselves decently as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envy: and should be very careful not to abuse ourselves by sin and sensuality, upon this very consideration, that the Son hath put such an honour and dignity upon us: we should reverence that nature which God did not disdain to assume, and to inhabit here on earth, and in which he now gloriously reigns in heaven at the right hand of his Father; to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XLIV.

[Preached in the Church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, Jan. 6, 1679.]

CONCERNING THE DIVINITY OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR.

The Word was made flesh.—JOHN i. 14.

I PROCEED now to prosecute the third corollary or conclusion, which does necessarily follow from the description which St. John in the beginning of his Gospel gives of the Word, and which I have so largely explained in the foregoing discourse: and it was this—

That the Word, here described by the evangelist, had an existence before his incarnation, and his being born of the blessed virgin.

This assertion, I told you, is levelled directly against the Socinians, who affirm our blessed Saviour to be a mere man, and deny that he had any existence before he was born of the virgin Mary, his mother: which position of their's does perfectly contradict all the former conclusions, which have been so evidently drawn from the description here given of the Word: and not only so, but hath forced them to interpret this whole passage in the beginning of St. John's Gospel in a very different sense from that which was constantly received, not only by the ancient fathers, but by the general consent of all Christians for 1500 years together. For to establish this their opinion of our Saviour's being a mere man, and having no existence before his birth, they have found it necessary to expound this whole passage quite to another sense, and such as by their own

confession was never mentioned, nor, I believe, thought of, by any christian writer whatsoever before Socinus.

For this reason I shall very particularly consider the interpretation which Socinus gives of this passage of St. John; and, besides the novelty of it, which they themselves acknowledge, I make no doubt very plainly to manifest the great violence and unreasonableness, and likewise the inconsistency of it with other plain texts of the New Testament.

It is very evident what it was that forced Socinus to so strained and violent an interpretation of this passage of the evangelist, namely, that he plainly saw how much the obvious, and natural, and generally-received interpretation of this passage, in all ages of the christian church down to his time, stood in the way of his opinion, of Christ's being a mere man; which he was so fond of, and must of necessity have quitted, unless he would either have denied the Divine authority of St. John's Gospel, or else could supplant the common interpretation of this passage by putting a quite different sense upon it: which sense he could find no way to support without such pitiful and wretched shifts, such precarious and arbitrary suppositions, as a man of so sharp a reason and judgment as Socinus, could not, I thought, have ever been driven to. But necessity hath no laws, either of reason or modesty; and he who is resolved to maintain an opinion which he hath once taken up, must stick at nothing, but must break through all difficulties that stand in his way: and so the Socinians have here done, as will, I hope, manifestly appear in the following discourse.

They grant, that by the Word is here meant Christ,

by whom God spake and declared his mind and will to the world; which they make to be the whole reason of that name or title of the Word which is here given him, and not because by him God made the world: for the Word by which God made the world, they tell us, was nothing but the powerful command of God, and not a person who was designed to be the Messias. And because, as I have shewed before, the ancient Jews do make frequent mention of this title of the Word of God, by whom, they say, God made the world, and do likewise apply this title to the Messias; therefore to avoid this, Schlictingius says, that the Chaldee paraphrasts, Jonathan and Onkelos, do sometimes put the Word of God for God, by a metonymy of the effect for the cause: but then he confidently denies that they do any where distinguish the Word of God from the person of God, as they acknowledge that St. John here does; nor do they, says he, understand by the Word of God the Messias, but on the contrary do oppose the Word of God to the Messias. All which is most evidently confuted by that passage which I cited before out of the Targum of Jonathan, who renders those words concerning the Messias, "The Lord said unto my Lord," &c. thus: "The Lord said unto his Word, Sit thou on my right hand," &c. Where you see both that the Word of God is plainly distinguished from God, and that it is the title given to the Messias; which are the two things which Schlictingius doth so confidently deny.

This then being agreed on all hands, that by the Word St. John means the Messias, I shall, in the next place, shew by what strained and forced arts of interpretation the Socinians endeavour to avoid the plain and necessary consequence from this pas-

sage of St. John, namely, that the Word had an existence before he was made flesh, and born of the blessed virgin, his mother.

This then, in short, is the interpretation which they give of this passage, than which I think nothing can be more unnatural and violent.

"In the beginning:" this they will by no means have to refer to the creation of the world, but to the beginning of the gospel; that is, when the gospel first began to be published; then was Christ, and not before: "And he was with God;" that is, says Socinus, Christ as he was the word of God; that is, the gospel of Christ, which was afterwards by him revealed to the world, was first only known to God. But all this being somewhat hard, first to understand by the beginning not the beginning of the world but of the gospel; and then by the Word, which was with God, to understand the gospel which before it was revealed was only known to God; they have upon second thoughts found out another meaning of those words, "And the Word was with God;" that is, saith Schlictingius, Christ was taken up by God into heaven, and there instructed in the mind and will of God, and from thence sent down into the world again, to declare it to mankind.

"And the Word was God;" that is, say they, Christ had the honour and title of God conferred upon him, as magistrates also have, who in the Scripture are called gods: he was God, not by nature but by office, and by Divine constitution and appointment.

"All things were made by him:" this they will needs have to be meant of the renovation and reformation of the world by Jesus Christ, which is several times in Scripture called a new creation.

This, in short, is the sum of their interpretation

of this passage, which I shall now examine, and to which I shall oppose three things as so many invincible prejudices against it.

First, That not only all the ancient fathers of the christian church, but so far as I can find, all interpreters whatsoever, for fifteen hundred years together, did understand this passage of St. John in a quite different sense, namely, of the creation of the material, and not the renovation of the moral, world; and I add further, that the generality of Christians did so understand this passage, as to collect from it, as an undoubted point of Christianity, that the Word had a real existence before he was born of the blessed virgin.

And thus not only the orthodox Christians, but even the Arians, and Amelius the Platonist, who was a more indifferent judge than either of them, did understand this passage of St. John, without any thought of this invention, that he spake not of the old, but of the new, creation of the world by Jesus Christ, and the reformation of mankind by the preaching of the gospel. Which I dare say no indifferent reader of St. John, that had not been prepossessed and biased by some violent prejudice, would ever have thought of.

And surely it ought to be very considerable in this case, that the most ancient christian writers, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenæus, Tertullian, and even Origen himself, who is called the father of interpreters, are most express and positive in this matter. For Ignatius was the scholar of Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John; and Justin Martyr lived in the next age to that of the apostles; and Origen was a man of infinite learning and reading, and in his comments upon Scripture

seems to have considered all the interpretations of those that were before him. So that if this, which Socinus is so confident is the true sense of St. John, had been any where extant, he would not probably have omitted it; nay, rather would certainly have mentioned it, if for no other reason, yet for the surprising novelty and strangeness of it, with which he was apt to be over-much delighted.

So that if this interpretation of Socinus be true, here are two things very wonderful and almost incredible: First, That those who lived so very near St. John's time, and were most likely to know his meaning, as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, &c. should so widely mistake it: and then, that the whole christian world should for so many ages together be deceived in the ground and foundation of so important an article of faith, if it were true; or if it were not, should be led into so gross and dangerous an error as this must needs be, if Christ had no real existence before he was born into the world: and which would be necessarily consequent upon this, that no man did understand this passage of St. John aright before Socinus. This very consideration alone, if there were no other, was sufficient to stagger any prudent man's belief of this interpretation.

And as to the novelty of it, Socinus himself makes no difficulty to own it; nay, he seems rather to rejoice, and to applaud himself in it. Unhappy man! that was so wedded to his own opinion, that no objection, no difficulty, could divorce him from it.

And for this I refer myself to his preface to his explication of this first chapter of St. John's Gospel; where you shall find these words concerning the passage now in controversy: *Quorum verus sensus omnes prorsus qui quidem extarent, explanatores*

latuisse videtur; " the true sense of which words," says he, " seems to have been hid from all the expositors that ever were extant." And upon these words, ver. 10, " He was in the world, and the world was made by him," he hath this expression: *Quid autem hoc loco sibi velit Johannes, à nemine quod sciam adhuc rectè expositum fuit;* " but what St. John means in this place was never yet, that I know of, by any man rightly explained." And Schlictingius after him, with more confidence, but much less decency, tells us, that concerning the meaning of those expressions, " in the beginning," and of those which follow concerning the Word, the ancient interpreters did *ab apostoli mente delirare*, went " so far from the apostle's meaning as if they had raved and been out of their wits:" which is so extravagantly said, and with so much contempt of those great and venerable names, who were the chief propagators of Christianity in the world, and to whom all ages do so justly pay a reverence, that nothing can be said in excuse of him, but only that it is not usual with him to fall into such rash and rude expressions. But the man was really pinched by so plain and pressing a text; and where reason is weak and blunt, passion must be whetted, the only weapon that is left when reason fails: and I always take it for granted, that no man is ever angry with his adversary, but for want of a better argument to support his cause.

And yet to do right to the writers on that side, I must own, that generally they are a pattern of the fair way of disputing and of debating matters of religion without heat and unseemly reflections upon their adversaries; in the number of whom I did not expect that the primitive fathers of the christian

church would have been reckoned by them. They generally argue matters with that temper and gravity, and with that freedom from passion and transport, which becomes a serious and weighty argument: and for the most part they reason closely and clearly, with extraordinary guard and caution, with great dexterity and decency, and yet, with smartness and subtilty enough; with a very gentle heat, and few hard words: virtues to be praised wherever they are found, yea, even in an enemy, and very worthy our imitation: in a word, they are the strongest managers of a weak cause, and which is ill-founded at the bottom, that perhaps ever yet meddled with controversy: insomuch that some of the protestants, and the generality of the popish writers, and even of the Jesuits themselves, who pretend to all the reason and subtilty in the world, are in comparison of them but mere scolds and bunglers. Upon the whole matter, they have but this one great defect, that they want a good cause and truth on their side: which, if they had, they have reason, and wit, and temper enough to defend it.

But to return to the business. That which I urge them withal, and that from their own confession, is this—that this interpretation of theirs is perfectly new, and unknown to the whole christian world before Socinus; and, for that reason, in my opinion, not to be bragged of: because it is in effect to say, that the Christian religion in a point pretended on both sides to be of the greatest moment, was never rightly understood by any since the apostles' days, for fifteen hundred years together: and which makes the matter yet worse, that the religion which was particularly designed to overthrow polytheism and the belief of more gods, hath, according to them,

been so ill taught and understood by Christians for so many ages together, and almost from the very beginning of Christianity, as does necessarily infer a plurality of gods: an inconvenience so great, as no cause, how plausible soever it may otherwise appear, is able to stand under, and to sustain the weight of it.

For this the Socinians object to us at every turn, as the unavoidable consequence of our interpretation of this passage of St. John, and of all other texts of Scripture produced by us to the same purpose, notwithstanding that this interpretation hath obtained in the christian church for so many ages. Now whosoever can believe, that the christian religion hath done the work for which it was principally designed so ineffectually, must have very little reverence for it; nay, it must be a marvellous civility in him if he believe it at all. All that can be said in this case is, that it pleases God many times to permit men to hold very inconsistent things, and which do in truth, though they themselves discern it not, most effectually overthrow one another.

Secondly, Another mighty prejudice against this interpretation is this—that according to this rate of liberty in interpreting Scripture, it will signify very little or nothing, when any person or party is concerned to oppose any doctrine contained in it; and the plainest texts for any article of faith, how fundamental and necessary soever, may by the same arts and ways of interpretation be eluded and rendered utterly ineffectual for the establishing of it. For example: if any man had a mind to call in question that article of the creed concerning the creation of the world, why might he not, according to Socinus's way of interpreting St. John, understand the first chapter of Genesis concerning the beginning of

the Mosaical dispensation, and interpret the creation of the heaven and the earth to be the institution of the Jewish polity and religion, as by the new heavens, and the new earth, they pretend is to be understood the new state of things under the gospel? And why may not the chaos signify that state of darkness and ignorance in which the world was before the giving of the law by Moses? and so on; as a very learned divine of our own hath ingeniously shewn more at large.

Dr. Stillingfleet, late bishop of Worcester.

There is no end of wit and fancy, which can turn any thing any way, and can make whatever they please to be the meaning of any book, though never so contrary to the plain design of it, and to that sense which at the first hearing and reading of it is obvious to every man of common sense.

And this, in my opinion, Socinus hath done in the case now before us, by imposing a new and odd and violent sense upon this passage of St. John, directly contrary to what any man would imagine to be the plain and obvious meaning of it, and contrary likewise to the sense of the Christian church in all ages down to his time; who yet had as great or greater advantages of understanding St. John aright, and as much integrity as any man can now modestly pretend to: and all this only to serve and support an opinion, which he had entertained before, and therefore was resolved one way or other to bring the Scripture to comply with it: and if he could not have done it, it is greatly to be feared that he would at last have called in question the Divine authority of St. John's Gospel, rather than have quitted his opinion.

And to speak freely, I must needs say that it seems to me a much fairer way to reject the Divine autho-

rity of a book, than to use it so disingenuously, and to wrest the plain expressions of it with so much straining and violence from their most natural and obvious sense: for no doctrine whatsoever can have any certain foundation in any book, if this liberty be once admitted, without regard to the plain scope and occasion of it, to play upon the words and phrases with all the arts of criticism, and with all the variety of allegory, which a brisk and lively imagination can devise; which I am so far from admiring in the expounding of the Holy Scriptures, that I am always jealous of an overlaboured and far-fetched interpretation of any author whatsoever.

I do readily grant, that the Socinian writers have managed the cause of the Reformation against the innovations and corruptions of the church of Rome, both in doctrine and practice, with great acuteness and advantage in many respects: but I am sorry to have cause to say, that they have likewise put into their hands better and sharper weapons than ever they had before, for the weakening and undermining of the authority of the Holy Scriptures; which Socinus indeed hath in the general strongly asserted, had he not by a dangerous liberty of imposing a foreign and forced sense upon particular texts brought the whole into uncertainty.

Thirdly, Which is as considerable a prejudice against this new interpretation of this passage of St. John as either of the former, I shall endeavour to shew, that this point, of the existence of the Word, before his incarnation, does not rely only upon this single passage of St. John, but is likewise confirmed by many other texts of the New Testament conspiring in the same sense, and utterly incapable of the interpretation which Socinus gives of it.

I find he would be glad to have it taken for granted that this is the only text in the New Testament to this purpose: and therefore he says very cunningly, that this doctrine of the existence of the Son of God before his incarnation is too great a doctrine to be established upon one single text. And this is something, if it were true, that there is no other text in the New Testament that does plainly deliver the same sense: and yet this were not sufficient to bring in question the doctrine delivered in this passage of St. John.

That "God is a spirit," will, I hope, be acknowledged to be a very weighty and fundamental point of religion; and yet I am very much mistaken, if there be any more than one text in the whole Bible that says so, and that text is only in St. John's Gospel. I know it may be said, that from the light of natural reason it may be sufficiently proved that God is a spirit: but surely Socinus, of all men, cannot say this with a good grace; because he denies that the existence of a God can be known by natural light without Divine revelation: and if it cannot be known by natural light that there is a God, much less can it be known by natural light what God is, whether a spirit or a body.

And yet after all it is very far from being true that there is but one text to this purpose; which yet he thought fit to insinuate by way of excuse for the novelty and boldness of his interpretation; of which any one that reads him may see that he was sufficiently conscious to himself, and therefore was so wise as to endeavour by this sly insinuation to provide and lay in against it. I have likewise another reason which very much inclines me to believe that Socinus was the first author of this interpretation, because it

seems to me next to impossible, that a man of so good an understanding as he was, could ever have been so fond of so ill-favoured a child, if it had not been his own. And yet I do not at all wonder, that his followers came into it so readily, since they had him in so great a veneration, it being natural to all sects to admire their master; besides that, I doubt not but they were very glad to have so great an authority as they thought him to be, to vouch for an interpretation which was so seasonably devised for the relief of their cause, in so much danger to be overthrown by a text that was so plain and full against them.

And how little ground there is for this insinuation, that this is the only text in the New Testament to this purpose, I shall now shew from a multitude of other texts to the same sense and purpose with this passage of St. John. And I shall rank them under two heads:

First, Those which expressly assert the Son of God to have been, and to have been in heaven with God, and partaker with him in his glory before his incarnation and appearance in the world.

Secondly, Those which affirm, that the world and all creatures whatsoever were made by him.

I. Those texts which expressly assert the Son of God to have been, and to have been in heaven with God, and partaker with him in his glory, before his incarnation and appearance in the world.

John iii. 13. "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven:" where the Son is said to have come down from heaven, in respect of the union of his Divinity with human nature, and his special residence in it here below: and yet he is said

so to have "come down from heaven" as still to be in heaven: "he that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven;" that is, in respect of his Divinity, by which he is every-where present: and he that came down from heaven is here called the "Son of man," by the same figure that his blood is elsewhere called the "blood of God," the apostle ascribing that to one nature which is proper to the other: this we take to be the most natural and easy sense of this text, and most agreeable to the tenor of the New Testament. Acts xx. 28.

Again, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" so that, if he really ascended up into heaven, after his resurrection, he was really there before his incarnation. John vi. 62.

"Before Abraham was, (says our blessed Saviour) I am;" the obvious sense of which words is, that he had a real existence before Abraham was actually in being. John viii. 58.

Again it is said, that "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God," &c. John xiii. 3.

And again, "For the Father himself loveth you, because ye loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world and go to the Father:" this was so very plain, that his disciples, who were slow enough of apprehension in other things, did understand this so well, that upon this declaration of his they were convinced of his omniscience, which is an incommunicable property of the Divinity: for so John xvi. 27, 28.

it immediately follows: "His disciples said unto him,
Ver. 29, 30. Lord, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no parable: now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God." So that either this which I have all along declared must be the meaning of our Saviour's words, or else his disciples were grossly mistaken and did not understand him at all: and, if so, then surely our Saviour before he had proceeded any farther would have corrected their mistake, and have set them right in this matter: but so far is he from doing that, that he allows them to have understood him aright: for thus it follows,
Ver. 31. "Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?" as if he had said—I am glad that you are at last convinced and do believe that I came from God, and must return to him; and that I know all things, which none but God can do. Is it now possible for any man to read this passage, and yet not to be convinced that the disciples understood our Saviour to speak literally? but if his meaning was, as the Socinians would make us believe, then the disciples did perfectly mistake his words; the contrary whereof is I think very plain and evident beyond all contradiction.

Again, "And now, O Father, glorify
John xvii. 5. me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee, before the world was:" this surely is not spoken of his being with God after his incarnation, and before his entrance upon his public ministry: they have not, I think, the face to understand this expression, "before the world was," of the new creation; but to endeavour to avoid it another way, which I shall consider by and by.

And a little after, "I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and known assuredly, that I came from thee, and that thou didst send me." Ver. 8.

Again, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life: for the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal Life," for so he calls the Son of God, "which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." 1 John i. 1, 2.

And that he was not only with God before he assumed human nature, but also was really God, St. Paul tells us, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, (οὐχ' ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο) did not arrogate to himself to be equal with God;" that is, he made no ostentation of his Divinity: for this I take to be the true meaning of that phrase, both because it is so used by Plutarch, and because it makes the sense much more easy and current, thus: who, being in the form of God, did not assume an equality with God; that is, he did not appear in the glory of his Divinity, which was hid under a veil of human flesh and infirmity; "but he emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, (or in the habit of a man,) he became obedient to the death," &c. So that if his being made in the likeness and fashion of a man does signify that he was really man by his incarnation, then surely his "being in the form of God" when he took upon him the fashion and likeness of man, and "the form of a servant," or slave, must Phil. ii. 5—8.

in all reason signify that he was really God before he became man: for which reason the same apostle did not doubt to say, that "God was manifested in the flesh."

1 Tim. iii. 16.

And now I hope that I have made it fully appear, that the beginning of St. John's Gospel is not the single and only text upon which we ground this great doctrine, as Socinus calls it, and as we really esteem it to be: for you see that I have produced a great many more; to avoid the dint and force whereof the Socinians do chiefly make use of these two answers:

First, To those texts, which say that "he was in heaven, and came down from heaven," they give this answer; that our Saviour some time before his entrance upon his public ministry, they cannot agree precisely when, was taken up into heaven, and then and there had the will of God revealed to him, and was sent down from heaven again to make it known to the world.

This is so very arbitrary and precarious a supposition, that I must confess myself not a little out of countenance for them, that men of so much wit and reason should ever be put to so sorry and pitiful a shift. For can any man imagine, that in so exact a history of our Saviour's life, written by several persons, the relation of so important a matter as this, and of the circumstances of it, should be wholly omitted? that we should have a particular account of his being carried into Egypt in his infancy, and of the time when he was brought back from thence: of his disputing in the Temple with the Jewish doctors, and putting them to silence when he was but twelve years of age: a punctual relation of his being baptized by John; and how after that he was led

by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil," and was carried by that evil spirit from one place to another: but not one word of his being taken up by God into heaven, and of his coming down again from thence; not the least intimation given either of the time or any other circumstance of so memorable a thing, upon which, according to the Socinians, the authority of his mission, and the Divinity of his doctrine, did so much depend: when so many things of so much less moment, are so minutely and exactly reported, what can be the reason of this deep silence in all the evangelists concerning this matter? But, above all, it is to be wondered, that St. John, who wrote his Gospel last, and, as Eusebius tells us, on purpose to supply the omissions of the other evangelists, should give no account of this thing; and yet, as the Socinians suppose, should so often take it for granted, and refer to it; as when it is said, that "he came forth from God," and was "sent from God," and "came down" from heaven, besides several other expressions to this purpose.

Who can believe this? And can it then be reasonable to suppose such a thing? and this without any ground from the history of the gospel, only to serve an hypothesis which they had taken up, and which they cannot maintain, unless they may have leave to make a supposition, for which they have nothing in truth to say, but only that it is necessary to defend an opinion which they are resolved not to part with upon any terms.

This is so inartificial, not to say absurd, a way of avoiding a difficulty, to take for granted whatever is necessary to that purpose, that no man of common ingenuity would make use of it: and there is no surer sign that a cause is greatly distressed than

to be driven to such a shift. For do but give a man leave to suppose what he pleases, and he may prove what he will, and avoid any difficulty whatever that can be objected to him.

Besides that, according to this device, the Son of God did not first come from heaven into the world, as the Scripture seems every where to say, but first was in the world, and then went to heaven, and from thence came back into the world again: and he was not "in the beginning with God;" but was first in the world, and afterwards with God: whereas St. John says, that the "Word was in the beginning," and then, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us:" but they say, that he first "was made flesh," and then a great while after was "in the beginning with God:" a supposition which is quite contrary to all the texts which I have mentioned.

Nor do the several parts of this interpretation of theirs agree very well together. "In the beginning," that is, say they, when the gospel first began to be published, "was the Word;" and then, that is, "in the beginning—he was with God," that is, in heaven, to receive from God that doctrine which he was to deliver to the world: but if by the beginning be meant the first publication of the gospel, he was not then with God, but had been with him, and was come back from him before he entered upon his public ministry, which they make to be the meaning of "the beginning:" and "in the beginning he was God;" that is, say they, not God by nature, but by office and Divine constitution: and yet in this again they fall foul upon themselves, for they say he was not declared to be God till after his resurrection and his being advanced to the right hand of God: so that he was not God in their sense of "the begin-

ning," that is, when he entered upon his public ministry, and began to preach the gospel.

Secondly, As to some other texts which speak of his existence before his incarnation, as that he was "glorified with his Father before the world was;" and "before Abraham was, I am;" these they interpret thus: that "he was glorified with his Father before the world was," and that he was before "Abraham was," viz. in the Divine foreknowledge and decree: but then they surely do not consider that this is nothing but what might have been said of any other man, and even of Abraham himself, that "before he was," that is, before he had a real and actual existence, he was in the purpose and decree of God, that is, before he was, God did intend he should be: which is a sense so very flat, that I can hardly abstain from saying it is ridiculous. For certainly our Saviour did intend by saying this of himself, to give himself some preference and advantage above Abraham, which this sense and interpretation does not in the least do: because, of any other man, as well as of our blessed Saviour, it may as truly be said, that he was in the foreknowledge and decree of God before Abraham was born.

And I cannot but observe further, that our Saviour does not say, before Abraham was, I was; but "before Abraham was, I AM." Which is the proper name of God, whereby is signified the eternal duration and permanency of his being: in which sense he is said by the apostle to the Hebrews to be "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And so likewise he describes himself in St. John's visions: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was,

Heb. xiii. 8.

Rev. i. 8.

and which is to come, the Almighty :" and that this is spoken of the Son you may see in the same chapter, where he says of himself again, " I am the first and the last :" and so likewise he describes himself again, " I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last :" and that we may not doubt who it is that thus describes his own eternity, he, continuing still to speak in the same person, says, " I Jesus have sent my angel," &c. After this I shall only observe, that all these expressions are the common description which the Scripture gives of the eternity of God, whose being is commensurate to all the several respects of duration, past, present, and to come: besides that, the attribute of Almighty is also a part of this description, which is so peculiar a property of God, I mean of Him who is " God by nature," that the Scripture never gives it to any other.

Ver. 17.

Rev. xxii. 13.

Ver. 16.

II. I shall in the next place produce those texts which do expressly affirm, " that the world and all creatures whatsoever were made by him :" and this will not only infer his existence before his incarnation, but from all eternity.

And for this, besides this passage of St. John, we have the apostle to the Hebrews most express, who says, that " by him God made the worlds :" and St. Paul likewise says the same more fully and particularly, calling Jesus Christ, who was the " Son of God, the first-born of every creature;" that is, as I have shewn in my former discourse, the Heir and Lord of the whole creation : " for by him," says he, " were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones

Heb. i. 2.

Coloss. i. 15, 16.

or dominions, principalities or powers;" for so he calls the several orders of angels: "all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things:" or, as he is described in St. John's vision, he "is the beginning of the creation of God;" that is, the principal and efficient cause of the creation; or else, he was when all things began to be made, and therefore must be before any thing was created, and for that reason could not be a creature himself, and consequently, must of necessity have been from all eternity.

Now these texts must necessarily be understood of the old creation, and of the natural world, and not of the moral world, and the renovation and reformation of the minds and manners of men by the gospel: for that was only the world here below which was reformed by him, and not things in heaven; not the invisible world, not the several orders of good angels, which kept their first station, and have no need to be reformed and made anew: nor the devil and his evil angels; for though since the preaching of the gospel they have been under greater restraint, and kept more within bounds, yet we have no reason to think that they are at all reformed, but are devils still, and have the same malice and mind to do all the mischief to mankind that God will suffer them to do.

So that these texts seem, at first view, to be very plain and pressing of themselves; but they appear to be much more convincing when we consider the groundless interpretations whereby they endeavour to evade the dint and force of them. For can any man that seriously attends to the perpetual style and phrase of the New Testament, and to the plain scope and drift of the apostle's reasoning in these

texts, be induced to believe, that when St. Paul tells us, that "all things were created by him, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers:" I say, can any man of good sense persuade himself, that by all this the apostle means no more than the moral renovation of the world here below, and the reformation of mankind by Jesus Christ and his gospel which was preached unto them?

But there is yet one text more to this purpose, which I have reserved to the last place; because I find Schlictingius and Crellius, in their joint Comment upon it, to be put to their last shifts to avoid the force of it. It is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, at the beginning of it; where the apostle thus describes the Son of God: "God," says he, "hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath constituted Heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." From whence he argues the excellency of the gospel above the law: for the law was given by angels, but the gospel by the Son of God; whose pre-eminence above the angels he shews at large in the two first chapters of this Epistle.

Heb. i. 2.

And to this end he proves the two parts of the description which had been given of him; namely, that God had "constituted him Heir of all things," and that "by him he made the worlds."

Ver. 2.

First, That God had "constituted him Heir of all things," which is no where said of the angels: but of him it is said that he was "made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name

Ver. 4.

than they." The angels are only called God's ministers, for which the apostle cites the words of the Psalmist; but to Christ he gives the title of "his Son," and "his first-begotten," by virtue whereof he is "Heir of all things:" "For to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" and this I will agree with them to be spoken of Christ with respect to his resurrection, by which, as St. Paul tells us, he was "powerfully declared to be the Son of God." This is the first prerogative of Christ above the angels: but there is a far greater yet behind; for he proves,

Psal. civ. 4.

Ver. 5.

Rom. i. 4.

Secondly, That he hath not only the title of God given him, but that he was "truly and really God, because he made the world." That the title of God was given him he proves by a citation out of the Psalmist: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," &c. And that he was truly and really God, because he made the world, he proves by a citation out of another Psalm, where it is said of him, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands: they shall perish," &c.

Ver. 8.

Psal. xlv. 6, 7.

Ver. 10—12.

Let us now see how Schlictingius and Crellius interpret this text, cited out of the Psalmist by the apostle, as spoken of Christ. They say *that the author of this Epistle "could not have referred to Christ the former words of this citation, which speak of the creation of heaven and earth, unless he had taken it for granted, that

*Ne referre quidem hæc priora verba, de cœli tetræque creatione loquentia, ad Christum potuisset Autor, nisi pro concesso sumpsisset Christum esse sum-

mum illum Deum, cœli et terræ Creatorem; præsertim si ea, ut necesse foret, primò et directè ad Christum dicta esse censeas. Nam cum omnia psalmi verba manifestè de Deo loquantur, Christum autem Deum illum esse ne unico quidem verbo in toto hoc psalmo indicetur; necesse est ut si verba illa ad Christum directa esse velis, pro concesso sumas, Christum esse Deum illum summum de quo in psalmo sermo est.

Christ is the most high God; especially if they be understood, as they must necessarily be by those who take this for granted, to be spoken in the first place, and directly to, or concerning Christ: for since all the words of the Psalm are manifestly spoken of the most high God; but that Christ is that God, is not signified, no not so much as by one word in that Psalm; it is necessary that, if you will have these words to be directed to Christ, you must take it for granted, that Christ is that most high God of whom the Psalmist there speaks."

Now we will join issue with these interpreters upon this concession; viz. that the author of this Epistle could not have referred these words, which speak of the creation of heaven and earth, to Christ, without taking it for granted, that Christ is truly that God who made the world. And if the author of this Epistle does affirm these words of the Psalmist to be spoken of Christ, then they must acknowledge Christ to be the true God, who made heaven and earth: but the author of this Epistle does as evidently affirm these words to be spoken to or of Christ, as he does the words of any other text cited in this chapter: and for this I appeal to the common sense of every man that reads them.

These interpreters indeed are contented that the latter part of this citation should be spoken of Christ, but not the former: but why not the former as well as the latter, when they have so expressly told us, that all the words of this Psalm are manifestly spoken of God? What is the mystery of this? could

they not as easily have interpreted the former part, which speaks of the creation of heaven and earth, concerning the moral world, and the new creation, or reformation of mankind by Jesus Christ and his gospel, as well as so many other plain texts to the same purpose? no doubt they could as well have done it, and have set as good a face upon it when they had done it. But why then did they not do it? It was for a reason which they had no mind to tell, but yet it is not hard to be guessed at; namely, that if they had admitted the former words to have been spoken of Christ, they knew not what to do with the latter part of this citation: "they shall perish, but thou remainest; they shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed." Ver. 11, 12, What shall perish, and wax old, and be changed? why, the earth and the heavens, which the Son had made; that is, the moral world, the reformation of mankind, and the new creation of things by the gospel: all these must have undergone the same fate with the natural world, and must not only have been defaced, but utterly destroyed and brought to nothing. This they would not say, but they did see it, though they would not seem to see it: and we may plainly see by this, that they can interpret a text right when necessity forceth them to it, and they cannot without great inconvenience to their cause avoid it: but when men have once resolved to hold fast an opinion they have taken up, it then becomes not only convenient, but necessary, to understand nothing that makes against it: and this is truly the present case. But in the mean time where is ingenuity and love of truth?

And thus I have, with all the clearness and brevity

I could, searched to the very foundations of this new interpretation of this passage of the evangelist, upon which the Divinity of the Son of God is so firmly established; and likewise of the gross misinterpretations of several other texts to the same purpose in this evangelist, and in other books of the New Testament. All which interpretations I have endeavoured to shew to be not only contrary to the sense of all antiquity, of which, as Socinus had but little knowledge, so he seems to have made but little account; but to be also evidently contrary to the perpetual tenor and style of the Holy Scripture.

Before I go off from this argument, I cannot but take notice of one thing, wherein our adversaries in this cause do perpetually glory, as a mighty advantage which they think they have over us in this point of the Divinity of the Son of God, and consequently in that other point of the blessed Trinity; namely, that they have reason clearly on their side in this controversy, and that the difficulties and absurdities are much greater and plainer on our part than on theirs.

Here they are pleased to triumph without modesty, and without measure: and yet, notwithstanding this, I am not afraid here likewise to join issue with them, and am contented to have this matter brought to a fair trial at the bar of reason, as well as of Scripture, expounded by the general tradition of the Christian church: I say, by general tradition, which, next to Scripture, is the best and surest confirmation of this great point now in question between us, and that which gives us the greatest and truest light for the right understanding of the true sense and meaning of the Scripture, not only in this, but in most other important doctrines of the Christian religion.

I am not without some good hopes—I will not say confidence, for I never thought that to be so great an advantage to any cause as some men would be glad to make others believe it is; hoping to help and support a weak argument by a strong and mighty confidence: but surely modesty never hurt any cause, and the confidence of man seems to be much like the wrath of man, which St. James tells us, "worketh not the righteousness of God;" Chap. i. 20. that is, it never does any good, it never serves any wise and real purpose of religion.

I say, I am not without some good hopes, that I have in the foregoing discourses clearly shewn, that the tenor of Scripture and general tradition are on our side in this argument, and therefore I shall not need to give myself the trouble to examine this matter over again.

Now as to the point of reason, the great difficulty and absurdity which they object to our doctrine concerning this mystery, amounts to thus much—that it is not only above reason, but plainly contrary to it.

As to its being above reason, which they are loath to admit any thing to be, this I think will bear no great dispute: because, if they would be pleased to speak out, they can mean no more by this, but that our reason is not able fully to comprehend it: but, what then? are there no mysteries in religion? that I am sure they will not say, because God, whose infinite nature and perfections are the very foundation of all religion, is certainly the greatest mystery of all other, and the most incomprehensible: but we must not, nay they will not, for this reason deny, that there is such a being as God. And therefore, if there be mysteries in religion, it is no reasonable objection

against them that we cannot fully comprehend them: because all mysteries, in what kind soever, whether in religion or in nature, so long and so far as they are mysteries, are for that very reason incomprehensible.

But they urge the matter much farther; that this particular mystery, now under debate, is plainly contrary to reason: and if they can make this good, I will confess that they have gained a great point upon us. But then they are to be put in mind, that to make this good against us they must clearly shew some plain contradiction in this doctrine, which I could never yet see done by any. Great difficulty I acknowledge there is in the explication of it, in which the further we go, beyond what God has thought fit to reveal to us in Scripture concerning it, the more we are entangled, and that which men are pleased to call an explaining of it, does in my apprehension often make it more obscure; that is, less plain than it was before; which does not so very well agree with a pretence of explication.

Here then I fix my foot: that there are three differences in the Deity, which the Scripture speaks of by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and every where speaks of them as we use to do of three distinct persons: and therefore I see no reason why in this argument we should nicely abstain from using the word person; though I remember that St. Jerome does somewhere desire to be excused from it.

Now concerning these Three I might in the first place urge that plain and express text, "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these Three are one." But upon this I will not

John v. 7.

now insist, because it is pretended, that in some copies of greatest antiquity this verse is omitted; the contrary whereof is I think capable of being made out very clearly: but this matter would be too long to be debated at present.

However that be, thus much is certain and cannot be denied, that our Saviour commanded his apostles to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: and that the apostles, in their epistles, do in their most usual form of benediction join these three together: and it is yet further certain, that not only the name and title of God, but the most incommunicable properties and perfections of the Deity, are in Scripture frequently ascribed to the Son and the Holy Ghost; one property only excepted, which is peculiar to the Father, as he is the principle and fountain of the Deity, that he is of himself and of no other; which is not, nor can be, said of the Son and Holy Ghost.

Now let any man shew any plain and downright contradiction in all this; or any other difficulty besides this, that the particular manner of the existence of these three differences, or persons, in the Divine nature, expressed in Scripture by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is incomprehensible by our finite understandings, and inexplicable by us: in which I do not see what absurdity there is, since our adversaries cannot deny, that many things certainly are, the particular manner of whose existence we can neither comprehend nor explain.

Let us now see, whether the opinion of our adversaries hath not greater difficulties in it, and more palpable absurdities following from it. They say, that the Son of God is a mere creature; not God by nature, and yet truly and really God by office,

and by Divine appointment and constitution; to whom the very same honour and worship is to be given which we give to him who is God by nature.

And can they discern no difficulty, no absurdity in this? What! no absurdity in bringing idolatry by a back-door into the christian religion, one main design whereof was to banish idolatry out of the world? and will they in good earnest contest this matter with us, that the giving Divine worship to a mere creature is not idolatry? and can they vindicate themselves in this point any other way, than what will in a great measure acquit both the pagans and the papists from the charge of idolatry?

What! no absurdity in a God as it were but of yesterday? in a creature-God, in a God merely by positive institution; and this in opposition to a plain moral precept of eternal obligation, and to the fixed and immutable nature and reason of things?

So that to avoid the shadow and appearance of a plurality of deities they run really into it, and for any thing I can see, into downright idolatry, by "worshipping a creature besides the Creator, who is blessed for ever."

Rom. i. 25.

They can by no means allow two Gods by nature; no more can we: but they can willingly admit of two Gods; the one by nature, and the other by office, to whom they are content to pay the same honour which is due to him who is God by nature. Provided Christ will be contented to be but a creature, they will deal more liberally with him in another way than in reason is fit.

And do they see no absurdity in all this? nothing that is contrary to reason and good sense? nothing

that feels like inconsistency and contradiction? Do they consider how often God hath declared, that "he will not give his glory to another?" and that the apostle describes idolatry to be the giving service, or worship, to things "which by nature are no Gods?" Gal. iv. 8.

Surely if reason, guided by Divine Revelation, were to choose a God, it would make choice of one who is declared in Scripture to be "the only-begotten of the Father, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:" much rather than a mere creature, who did not begin to be till about seventeen hundred years ago.

I only propose these things, without any artificial aggravation, to their most serious and impartial consideration; after which I cannot think that these great masters of reason can think it so easy a matter to extricate themselves out of these difficulties. The God of truth lead us into all truth, and enlighten the minds of those who are in error, and give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, for his sake who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

And thus much may suffice to have been said upon this argument, which I am sensible is mere controversy: a thing which I seldom meddle with, and do not delight to dwell upon. But my text, which is so very proper for this season, hath almost necessarily engaged me in it: besides that, I think it a point of that concernment, that all Christians ought to be well instructed in it. And I have chosen rather, once for all, to handle it fully, and to go to the bottom of it, than in every sermon to be flirting at it, without saying any thing to the

purpose against it: a way which, in my opinion, is neither proper to establish men in the truth, nor to convince them of their error.

I shall only at present make this short reflection upon the whole: that we ought to treat the Holy Scriptures as the oracles of God, with all reverence and submission of mind to the doctrine therein revealed: and to interpret them with that candour and simplicity, which is due to the sincere declarations of God intended for the instruction, and not for the deception and delusion of men: I say, we should treat them as the oracles of God, and not like the doubtful oracles of the heathen deities, that is, in truth, of the devil; which were contrived and calculated on purpose to deceive, containing, and for the most part intending, a sense directly contrary to the appearing and most obvious meaning of the words: for the devil was the first author of equivocation; though the Jesuits have since made it a lawful way of lying, which their father, of whom they learned it, had not credit and authority enough to do.

And it deserves likewise to be very well considered by us, that nothing hath given a greater force to the exceptions of the church of Rome against the Holy Scriptures, being a sufficient and certain rule of faith, than the uncertainty into which they have brought the plainest texts imaginable for the establishing of doctrines of greatest moment in the christian religion, by their remote and wrested interpretation of them: which way of dealing with them seems to be really more contumelious to those holy Oracles, than the downright rejecting of their authority: because this is a fair and open way of attacking them, whereas the other is an insidious,

and therefore more dangerous, way of undermining them.

But as for us, who do in good earnest believe the Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, let us take all our doctrines and opinions from those clear fountains of truth, not disturbed and darkened by searching anxiously into all the possible senses that the several words and expressions of Scripture can bear, and by forcing that sense upon them which is most remote and unnatural, and in the mean time wilfully overlooking and passing by that sense which is most obvious and easy to the common apprehension of any unbiassed and impartial reader. This is to use the Holy Scriptures as the church of Rome hath done many holy and good men, whom they are pleased to brand with the odious name of heretics, to torture them till they speak the mind of their tormentors though never so contrary to their own.

I will now conclude this whole discourse with a saying which I heard from a great and judicious man—*Non amo nimis argutam theologiam;* "I love no doctrines in Divinity which stand so very much upon quirk and subtilty."

And I cannot upon this occasion forbear to say, that those doctrines of religion, and those interpretations of Scripture, have ever been to me the most suspected, which need abundance of wit and a great many criticisms to make them out: and considering the wisdom and goodness of Almighty God, I cannot possibly believe, but that all things necessary to be believed and practised by Christians, in order to their eternal salvation, are plainly contianed in the Holy Scriptures: God surely hath not dealt so hardly with mankind as to make any thing

necessary to be believed or practised by us, which he hath not made sufficiently plain to the capacity of the unlearned as well as of the learned. God forbid that it should be impossible for any man to be saved and to get to heaven, without a great deal of learning to direct and carry him thither, when the far greatest part of mankind have no learning at all! It was well said by Erasmus,—that it was never well with the christian world since it began to be a matter of so much subtilty and wit for a man to be a true Christian.

SERMON XLV.

[Preached in the Church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, Dec. 21, 1680.]

CONCERNING THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

The Word was made flesh.—JOHN i. 14.

THE last year, about this time, and upon the same occasion of the annual commemoration of the incarnation and nativity of our blessed Lord and Saviour, I began to discourse to you upon these words: in which I told you were contained three great points concerning our Saviour, the author and founder of our religion.

First, His incarnation; "the Word was made (or became) flesh."

Secondly, His life and conversation here amongst us; "and dwelt among us," εσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, he pitched his tabernacle among us, he lived here below in this world, and for some time made his residence and abode with us.

Thirdly, That in this state of his humiliation he gave great and clear evidence of his Divinity: whilst he appeared as a man and lived amongst us, there were great and glorious testimonies given of him, that he was the Son of God; and that in so peculiar a manner as no creature can be said to be: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

I began with the first of these, namely, his incarnation, "the Word was made flesh;" for the full and clear explication of which words I proposed to consider these two things:

I. The person here spoken of, and who it is that is here said to be incarnate, or made flesh, namely, the Word. And this I have handled at large in my two former discourses upon this text. I shall now proceed in the

II. Second place, To give some account of the nature and manner of this incarnation, so far as the Scripture hath thought fit to reveal and declare this mystery to us. "The Word was made flesh;" that is, he who is personally called the Word, and whom the evangelist hath so fully and clearly described in the beginning of his Gospel, "he became flesh;" that is, assumed our nature and became man, for so the word flesh is frequently used in Scripture, for man or human nature.

So that by the Word's becoming flesh, that is, man, the evangelist did not only intend to express to us that he assumed a human body without a soul, but that he became a perfect man, consisting of soul and body united. It is very probable, indeed, that the evangelist did purposely choose the word flesh, which signifies the frail and mortal part of humanity, to denote to us the great condescension of the Son of God, in assuming our nature, with all its infirmities, and becoming subject to frailty and mortality for our sake.

Having thus explained the meaning of this proposition, "the Word was made flesh," I shall in a further prosecution of this argument take into consideration these three things:

First, I shall consider more distinctly what may reasonably be supposed to be implied in this expression of the Word's being made flesh.

Secondly, I shall consider the objections which are commonly brought against this incarnation of

the Son of God, from the seeming impossibility or incongruity of the thing.

Thirdly, And because, after all that can be said in answer to those objections, it may still appear to us very strange, that God could without all this circumstance, and condescension even almost beneath the majesty of the great God, at least as we are apt to think, have given laws to mankind, and have offered forgiveness of sins and eternal life upon their repentance of sins past, and sincere though imperfect obedience for the future: I say, it may seem strange, that notwithstanding this, God should yet make choice of this way and method of our salvation. I shall, therefore, in the last place, endeavour to give some probable account of this strange and wonderful dispensation, and shew, that it was done in great condescension to the weakness and common prejudices of mankind; and that when it is thoroughly considered it will appear to be much more for our comfort and advantage than any other way which the wisdom of this world would have been apt to devise and pitch upon. And in all this I shall all along take either the plain declarations of Scripture, or the pregnant intimations of it for my ground and guide.

I. I shall consider more distinctly what may reasonably be supposed to be implied in this expression of the Word's being made flesh; namely, these five things.

First, The truth and reality of the thing: that the Son of God did not only appear in the form of human flesh, but did really assume it; "the Word was made flesh," as the evangelist expressly declares: for if this had been only a phantasm and apparition, as some heretics of old did fancy, it would in all probability have been like the appearance of angels

mentioned in the Old Testament, sudden and of short continuance, and would after a little while have vanished and disappeared. But "he dwelt among us," and conversed familiarly with us a long time, and for many years together; and the Scripture useth all the expressions which are proper to signify a real man, and a real human body, and there were all the signs and evidences of reality that could be. For the Word is said to be made flesh, and Christ is said to be the seed of David, according to the flesh, and to be made of a woman; and all this to shew, that he was a real man, and had a real and substantial body: for he was born, and by degrees grew up to be a man, and did perform all such actions as are natural and proper to men: he continued a great while in the world, and at last suffered and died, and was laid in the grave. He did not vanish and disappear like a phantasm or spirit, but he died like other men: and his body was raised again out of the grave; and, after he was risen, he conversed forty days upon earth, and permitted his body to be handled; and last of all was visibly taken up into heaven.

So that either we must grant him to have had a real body, or we have cause to doubt whether all mankind be not mere phantasms and apparitions: for greater evidence no man can give that he is really clothed with and carries about him a true and substantial body, than the Son of God did in the days of his flesh. It is to me very wonderful, upon what ground, or indeed to what end, the heretics of old, Marcion and others, did deny the reality of Christ's flesh. Surely they had a great mind to be heretics who took up so senseless an opinion for no reason, and to no purpose.

Secondly, Another thing implied in the Word's

being made flesh, is, that this was done peculiarly for the benefit and advantage of men. "The Word was made flesh," that is, became man; for so I have shewn the word flesh to be often used in Scripture. And this the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews takes very special notice of, as a great grace and favour of God to mankind, that his Son appeared in our nature, and consequently for our salvation; as it is said in the Nicene creed, "who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate," &c. "For verily (says the apostle), he took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham," οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται—"he did not assume the angelical nature," so our translators understood the phrase; but the word also signifies to take hold of a thing which is falling, as well as to assume or take on him. "He did not take hold of the angels," when they were falling, but suffered them to lapse irrecoverably into misery and ruin: but he took hold of human nature when it was falling, and particularly of the seed of Abraham; and by the seed of Abraham, that is, by himself, "in whom all the nations of the earth were blessed," he brought salvation first to the Jews, and then to the rest of mankind. The apostle chooses to derive this blessing from Abraham, that so he might bring it nearer to the Jews to whom he wrote this Epistle, and might thereby more effectually recommend the gospel to them, and the glad tidings of that great salvation in which they had so peculiar an interest.

Heb. ii. 16.

And it is some confirmation of the interpretation I have given of that expression, "he took not on him," &c. that the evangelist uses the very same word for taking hold of one that was ready to sink:

for so it is said of St. Peter when he was ready to sink, that "Christ put forth his hand, καὶ ἐπελάβετο, and caught hold of him," and saved him from drowning: and thus the Son of God caught hold of mankind which was ready to sink into eternal perdition. He laid hold of our nature, or, as it is expressed in the same chapter, "he took part of flesh and blood," that in our nature he might be capable of effecting our redemption and deliverance.

Mat. xiv. 31.

But it is no where said in Scripture, not the least intimation given there, that the Son of God ever shewed such grace and favour to the angels: but "the Word became flesh," that is, became man: he did not assume the angelical nature, but was contented to be clothed with the rags of humanity, and "to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh," that is, of sinful man.

Thirdly, This expression of the Word's being made flesh, may further imply his assuming the infirmities, and submitting to the miseries, of human nature. This I collect from the word flesh, by which the Scripture often uses to express our frail and mortal nature. The Son of God did not only condescend to be made man, but also to become mortal and miserable for our sakes: he submitted to all those things which are accounted most grievous and calamitous to human nature: to hunger and want, to shame and contempt, to bitter pains and agonies, and to a most cruel and disgraceful death: so that in this sense also he became flesh, not only by being clothed with human nature, but by becoming liable to all the frailties and sufferings of it: of which he had a greater share than any of the sons of men ever had: for never was sorrow like to his

sorrow, nor sufferings like to his suffering, the weight and bitterness whereof was such as to wring from him, the meekest and most patient endurer of sufferings that ever was, that doleful complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Fourthly, In this expression, "the Word was made flesh," is likewise implied the union of the Divinity with human nature in one person. And this the text expresseth in such words as seem to signify a most perfect, and intimate, and vital union of the Divine and human natures of Christ in one person: "the Word was made (or became) flesh:" which what else can it signify but one of these two things—either that the eternal Word and only-begotten Son of God was changed into a man, which is not only impossible to be, but impious to imagine; or else, that the Son of God did assume our nature and became man, by his Divinity being united to human nature, as the soul is vitally united to the body; without either being changed into it, or confounded with it, or swallowed up by it, as the Eutychian heretics fancied the human nature of Christ to be swallowed up of his Divinity? which, had it been so, St. John had expressed himself very untowardly when he says, "the Word became flesh;" for it had been quite contrary, and flesh had become the Word, being changed into it, and swallowed up by it, and lost in it.

The only thing then that we can reasonably imagine to be the meaning of this expression is this—that the Son of God assumed our nature, and united himself with it, as our souls are united with our bodies; and as the soul and body united make one person, and yet retain their distinct natures and properties; so may we conceive the Divine and human

natures in Christ to be united into one person: and this without any change or confusion of the two natures.

I say, the Divinity united itself with human nature: for though flesh be only mentioned in the text, yet it did not only assume a human body, which was the heresy of Apollinaris and his followers, upon a mistake of this and some other texts of Scripture; but he assumed the whole human nature, that is, a human soul united to a real and natural body: for so I have shewn the word flesh to be frequently used in Scripture, not only for the body, but for the whole man, by an usual figure of speech: as, on the other hand, soul is frequently used for the whole man or person: so many souls are said to have gone down with Jacob into Egypt, that is, so many persons.

But this I need not insist longer upon, our Saviour being so frequently in Scripture and so expressly said to be a man; which could with no propriety of speech have been said, had he only assumed a human body: nor could he have been said to have been "made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted," had he only had a human body, but not a soul: for then the meaning must have been, that he had been "made in all things like unto us," that is, like unto man, that only excepted which chiefly makes the man, that is, the soul: and the addition of those words, "sin only excepted," had been no less strange; because a human body, without a soul, is neither capable of being said to have sin, or to be without it.

And this may suffice to have been spoken in general concerning that great mystery of the hypostatical, as they that love hard words love to call it, or personal union of the Divine and human natures

in the person of our blessed Saviour. In the more particular explication whereof it is not safe for our shallow understandings to wade further than the Scripture goes before us, for fear we go out of our depth and lose ourselves in the profound inquiry into the deep things of God, which he has not thought fit in this present state of darkness and imperfection to reveal more plainly and fully to us. It ought to be thought sufficient that the Scripture, speaking of the same person, Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour, doth frequently and expressly call him both God and man: which how it can be so easily conceived upon any other supposition than that of the union of the Divine and human natures in one person, I must confess that I am not able to comprehend.

Fifthly, and lastly, All this which I have shewn to be implied in this proposition, "the Word was made flesh," does signify to us the wonderful and amazing condescension and love of God to mankind in sending his Son into the world and submitting him to this way and method for our salvation and recovery. "The Word was made flesh:" what a step is here made in order to the reconciling of men to God! from heaven to earth; from the top of glory and majesty to the lowest gulph of meanness and misery: the evangelist seems here to use the word flesh, which signifies the meannest and vilest part of humanity, to express to us how low the Son of God was contented to stoop for the redemption of man. "The Word was made flesh:" two terms at the greatest distance from one another, are here brought together: the Son of God is here expressed to us by one of his highest and most glorious titles, the Word, which imports both power and wisdom; "Christ, the power of

1 Cor. i. 24.

God, and the wisdom of God," as the apostle calls him: and human nature is here described by its vilest part, flesh; which imports frailty and infirmity: "the Word became flesh," that is, submitted to that from which it was at the greatest distance: he who was the "power of God, and the wisdom of God," submitted not only to be called, but really to become a frail and miserable man; not only to assume our nature, but to put on all the infirmities, and, which is the greatest of all, the mortality of it.

And this is the great mystery of godliness, that is, of the christian religion, that God should be manifested in the flesh, and become man, with amost gracious and merciful design to bring man back again to God: that he should become a miserable and a mortal man to save us from eternal death, and make us partakers of everlasting life: that the Son of God should condescend to inhabit our vile nature, to wear rags, and to become a beggar for our sakes; and all this not only to repair those dismal ruins which sin had made in it, and to restore us to our former estate: but to better and advance our condition, and by degrees to bring us to a state of much greater perfection and happiness than that from which we fell.

And that he should become man on purpose that he might dwell among us, and converse with us, and thoroughly instruct us in our duty, and shew us the way to eternal life by his heavenly doctrine, and as it were take us by the hand and lead us in that way, by the perfect and familiar example of a most blameless and holy life; shewing us how God himself thought fit to live in this world, when he was pleased to become man.

That, by conversing with us in the likeness and

nature of man, he might become a human, and in some sort an equal and familiar, an imitable and encouraging example of innocency and goodness, of meekness and humility, of patience and submission to the will of God under the sorest afflictions and sufferings, and, in a word, a most perfect pattern of a Divine and heavenly conversation upon earth.

And that by this means we might for our greater encouragement in holiness and virtue, see all that which the law of God requires of us exemplified in our nature, and really performed and practised by a man like ourselves.

And that likewise in our nature he might conquer and triumph over the two great enemies of our salvation, the world and the devil: and by first suffering death, and then overcoming it, and by rescuing our nature from the power of it by his resurrection from the dead, he might deliver us from the fear of death, and give us the glorious hopes of a blessed immortality; for by assuming our frail and mortal nature he became capable of suffering and of shedding his precious blood for us, and by that means of purchasing forgiveness of sins and eternal redemption for us.

And, further yet, that by being subject to the miseries and infirmities of humanity, he might from his own experience, the surest and most sensible sort of knowledge and instruction, learn to have a more compassionate sense of our infirmities, and be more apt to commiserate us in all our sufferings and temptations, and more ready to succour us labouring under them.

And, finally, that as a reward of his obedience and sufferings in our nature, he might in the same nature be "exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on

high," there to continue " for ever to make intercession for us."

II. I shall in the next place consider the objections against the incarnation of the Son of God, from the supposed impossibility and incongruity of the thing. I shall mention three, and endeavour in as few words as I can to give a clear and satisfactory answer to them.

First, It is objected, that the incarnation of the Son of God, as I have explained it, necessarily supposing an union of the Divinity with human nature, is, if not altogether impossible, yet a very unintelligible, thing.

Now that there is no impossibility in the thing seems to be very evident from the instance whereby I have endeavoured to illustrate it, of the union between the soul and the body of man, which we must acknowledge to be a thing possible, because we are sure that it is; and yet no man can explain, either to himself or to any one else, the manner how it is, or can be conceived to be; but for all that we are as certain as we can be of any thing, that it is so.

And is it not every whit as possible for God, if he so please, to unite himself to human nature, as it is for the soul to be united to the body? and that we are not able to conceive the manner how this is, or can be done, ought not in reason to be any prejudice against the truth and certainty of the thing: this indeed may make it seem strange to us, but by no means incredible: because, we do most firmly believe a great many things to be, the manner of whose being we do not at all comprehend. And therefore I take it for an undoubted principle, which no man can gainsay,—" that to assure us that a thing really is, it is not necessary for us to know the manner how

it is, or can be: it is sufficient for us to know, that the thing is not impossible; and of that we have the very best demonstration that can be, if we be sure that it is.

Secondly, Supposing this thing to be possible, and capable in any measure to be understood, which yet I have shewn not to be necessary to our firm belief of it; it is further objected, that it seems to be a thing very incongruous, and much beneath the dignity of the Son of God, to be united to human nature, and to submit to so near alliance with that which is so very mean and despicable: yea, to be infinitely more below him, than for the greatest prince in this world to match with the poorest and most contemptible beggar.

But herein surely we measure God too much by ourselves, and because we who are evil have seldom so much goodness as to stoop beneath ourselves for the benefit and good of others, we are apt to think that God hath not so much goodness neither: and because our ill-nature, and pride, and folly, as indeed all pride is folly, will not suffer us to do it, we presently conclude that it doth not become God. But what Pliny said to the Emperor Trajan concerning earthly kings and potentates, is much more true of the Lord of glory, the great King of heaven and earth; *Cui nihil ad augendum fastigium superest, hoc uno modo crescere potest, si seipsum submittat, securus magnitudinis suæ;* "He that is at the top, and can rise no higher, hath yet this one way left to become greater, by stooping beneath himself;" which he may very safely do, being secure of his own greatness. The lower any being, be he never so high, condescends to do good, the glory of his goodness shines so much the brighter. Men are many times too

proud and stiff to bend, too perverse and ill-natured to stoop beneath their own little greatness for the good of others; but God, whose "ways are not as our ways," and whose thoughts are as much above our low and narrow thoughts, "as the heavens are high above the earth," did not disdain nor think it below him to become man for the good of mankind; and, as much as the Divinity is capable of being so, to become miserable to make us happy. We may be afraid that if we humble ourselves we shall be despised; that if we stoop, others will get above us and trample upon us: but God, though he condescend never so low, is still secure of his own greatness, and that none can take it from him.

So that in truth, and according to right reason, it was no real diminution or disparagement to the Son of God to become man for the salvation of mankind: but, on the contrary, it was a most glorious humility, and the greatest instance of the truest goodness that ever was. And therefore the apostle to the Hebrews, when he says, that "Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but was appointed of God to this office, as was Aaron;" does hereby seem to intimate, that it was a glory to the Son of God to be made an high priest for the sons of men: for though it was a strange condescension, yet was it likewise a most wonderful argument of his goodness, which is the highest glory of the Divine nature.

Heb. v. 5.

In short, if God for our sakes did submit himself to a condition which we may think did less become him, here is great cause of thankfulness, but none surely of cavil and exception: we have infinite reason to acknowledge and admire his goodness, but none at all to upbraid him with his kindness, and to

quarrel with him for having descended so much beneath himself to testify his love to us and his tender concernment for our happiness: besides that, when we have said all we can about this matter, I hope we will allow God himself to be the best and most competent judge what is fit for God to do; and that he needs not to take counsel of any of his creatures, what will best become him in this or in any other case: "Behold in this thou art not just; I will answer thee, that God is greater than man: why dost thou dispute against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." Job xxxiii. 12, 13.

Thirdly, If our reason could get over this difficulty, and admit that God might become man; yet it seems very unsuitable to the Son of God, and to his great design of instructing and reforming mankind, to appear in so low and suffering a condition. This, to the heathen philosophers, who, as the apostle tells us, "by wisdom knew not God," did not only seem unreasonable, but even ridiculous: so St. Paul tells us: "We," says he, "preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" to think that so poor and mean a man was fit to give laws to mankind, and to awe the minds of men by the authority of his doctrine; that one who was put to death himself should be believed by others when he promised to them life and immortality in another world, could not but appear very strange and unreasonable. 1 Cor. i. 23.

For answer to this, besides other excellent reasons and ends which the Scripture expressly assigns of our blessed Saviour's humiliation, in his assuming our nature with the frailties and miseries of it—as that he might be a teacher, and an example to us:

that by his bitter passion he might make expiation for sin, and set us a pattern of the greatest meekness and patience under the greatest provocations and sufferings: that having suffered so grievously himself, he might know how to commiserate and pity us in all our temptations and sufferings: that "by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage:" I say, besides all this, it was of great use that the great Teacher and Reformer of mankind should live in so mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride and vanity of the world by this consideration, that the Son of God, and the very best man that ever was, was a beggar, and "had not where to lay his head:" and likewise to convince men of these two great truths—that God may grievously afflict those whom he dearly loves; and, that it is possible for men to be innocent and contented in the midst of poverty, and reproach, and sufferings.

Had our blessed Saviour appeared in the person and pomp of a great temporal prince, the influence of his authority and example would probably have made more hypocrites and servile converts, but not have persuaded men one jot more to be inwardly holy and good. The great arguments that must do that, must not be fetched from the pomp and prosperity of this world, but from the great and eternal recompences of the other.

And it is well worth our observation, that nothing puzzled Cæsar Vaninus, who was perhaps the first and the only martyr for atheism that ever was; I say, nothing puzzled him more, than that he could not, from the history of our Saviour's life and actions written by the evangelists with so native a simpli-

city, fasten upon him any probable imputation of a secular interest and design in any thing that he said or did. No doubt but Vaninus, before he made this acknowledgment, had searched very narrowly into this matter: and could he have found any colour for such an imputation, he would have thought it sufficient to have blasted both him and his religion.

You may be pleased to consider further, that it was the opinion of the wisest Jews, that the best men, the children of God, who called God their Father, were many times exposed to the greatest sufferings and reproaches for the trial of their faith, and meekness, and patience, as we may see at large in the wisdom of Solomon, where, speaking of the malice and enmity of the wicked to one that was eminently righteous, he brings them in saying after this manner—"Let us lie in wait for the righteous, because he is not for our turn; he is clean contrary to our doings: he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressions of our youth: he professeth to have the knowledge of God, and he calleth himself the child of the Lord: he is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion: we are esteemed of him as counterfeits, he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness: he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his Father: let us see if his words be true, and what shall happen in the end of him: for if the just man be the Son of God, he will help him, and deliver him from the hands of his enemies: let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness and prove his patience: let us condemn him to a shameful death," &c. Chap. ii. 12—20.

This is so exact a character of our blessed Saviour, both in respect of the holiness and innocency of his life, and of the reproaches and sufferings which he met with from the wicked and malicious Jews, who persecuted him all his life, and at last conspired his death, that whoever reads this passage can hardly forbear to think it a prophetical description of the innocency and sufferings of the blessed Jesus: for he certainly, in the most eminent manner, was the Son of God, being called by the evangelist, "the only begotten of the Father."

Or if this was not a prediction concerning our blessed Saviour, yet thus much at least may be concluded from it, that in the judgment of the wisest among the Jews, it was not unworthy of the goodness and wisdom of the Divine Providence to permit the best man to be so ill treated by wicked men: and further, that in their judgment the innocency and virtues of an eminently-righteous man, are then set off to the best advantage, and do shine forth with the greatest lustre, when he is under the hardest circumstances of suffering and persecution from an evil world.

Add to this, likewise, that the best and wisest of the heathen philosophers do frequently inculcate such doctrines as these:—That worldly greatness and power are not to be admired, but rather to be despised by a wise man. That men may be very good and dear to the gods, and yet liable to the greatest miseries and sufferings in this world. That whoever suffers unjustly and bears it patiently, gives the greatest testimony to goodness, and does most effectually recommend piety and virtue, as things of greater value than the ease and pleasure of this present life: nay, further, that a good man cast into the

hardest circumstances of poverty and misery, of reproach and suffering, is the fittest person of all other to be the minister, and apostle, and preacher of God to mankind: which are the very words of Arian, a heathen philosopher, in his discourses of Epictetus. Now surely they who say such things have no reason to object to our blessed Saviour his low and suffering condition, as misbecoming one that was to be the great Teacher and Reformer of the world!

And as to that other part of the objection, That he who so freely promised immortality to others, could not, or however did not, save himself from death; this vanisheth into nothing when we consider that he rescued himself from the power of the grave: and it is so far from being ridiculous, to rely upon his promise of raising us up from the dead, that the objection itself is really so. For can any thing be more reasonable, than to rely upon Him for our hopes of immortality, who, by rising from the grave himself, and by conquering the powers of death and darkness, and triumphing openly over them by his visible ascension into heaven, hath given so plain and sensible a demonstration to all mankind, that he is able to make good to the uttermost all the glorious promises which he hath made to us of a blessed resurrection to eternal life and happiness in another world? To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XLVI.

[Preached in the Church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, Dec. 28, 1680.]

CONCERNING THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

The Word was made flesh.—John i. 14.

The third and last thing which I proposed upon this argument of the incarnation of the Son of God, was to give some account of this dispensation, and to shew that the wisdom of God thought fit thus to order things in great condescension to the weakness and common prejudices of mankind: and that when all things are duly weighed and considered, it will appear much more for our comfort and advantage, than any other way which the wisdom of men would have been most apt to devise and pitch upon.

And it is the more necessary to give some account of this matter, because, after all that hath hitherto been said in answer to the objections against it, it may still seem very strange to a considering man, that God, who could without all this circumstance and condescension have done the business for which his Son came into the world and appeared in our nature; that is, could have given the same laws to mankind, and have offered to us the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, upon our repentance for sins past, and a sincere endeavour of obedience for the future: I say, that notwithstanding this, he should yet make choice of this way for the redemption and recovery of fallen man, by sending his Son in our nature to accomplish this design.

And in the handling of this argument I shall, as I said before, all along take the express declarations, or at least the pregnant intimations of Scripture, for my ground and guide, it being always safest to take the reasons of the Divine counsels and actions from God himself: and, in the

First place, I make no manner of doubt to say, that it would be a great presumption and boldness in any man to affirm, that the infinite wisdom of God could not have brought about the salvation of men by any other way, than by this very way in which he hath done it. For why should we take upon us to set limits to infinite wisdom, and pretend to know the utmost extent of it? but since God hath been pleased to pitch upon this way rather than any other, this surely ought to be reason enough to satisfy us of the peculiar wisdom and fitness of it, whether the particular reasons of it appear to us or not.

And yet it cannot be denied to be a very noble argument, and well worthy our consideration, to inquire into the reasons of this dispensation, and to assign them particularly, if we can. For I look upon mysteries and miracles in religion to be much of the same nature, and that a great reverence is due to both where they are certain, and necessary in the nature and reason of the thing, but neither of them are easily to be admitted without necessity, and very good evidence.

Secondly, I consider, in the next place, that in the several revelations which God hath made of himself to mankind, he hath with great condescension accommodated himself both as to the manner and degree of them, to the condition and capacity, and other circumstances of the persons and people to whom they were made.

Particularly we find, that the dispensation of God towards the Jewish nation, was full of condescension to the temper, and prejudices, and other circumstances of that people. For the religion and laws which God gave them were far from being the best and most perfect in themselves; in which sense some understand that passage in the prophet Ezekiel, where it is said, that God "gave them statutes which were not good;" that is, very imperfect in comparison of what he could and would have given them, had they been capable of them; and yet, such as were very well suited and fitted to their present capacity and circumstances.

Thirdly, I observe yet further, that though the Christian religion, as to the main and substance of it, be a most perfect institution, being the law of nature revived and perfected; yet, upon a due consideration of things, it cannot be denied, that the manner and circumstances of this dispensation are full of condescension to the weakness of mankind, and very much accommodated to the most common and deeply-radicated prejudices of men concerning God and religion; and peculiarly fitted to remove and root them out of the minds of men, by substituting something in the place of them of as near a compliance with them as was consistent with the honour of Almighty God, and the great design of the Christian religion.

It is not easy to give a certain account of the true original of some notions and prejudices concerning God and religion, which have generally obtained in the world, in that variety of religions, and the different ways of worship and superstition, which have been in several nations of the earth: but in history and fact this is certain, that some notions, and those

very gross and erroneous, did almost universally prevail even among those who did extremely differ in the particular forms and modes of their superstition.

And though some of these were much more tolerable than others, yet God seems to have had great consideration of some very weak and gross apprehensions of mankind concerning religion. And as in some of the laws given by Moses, God was pleased particularly to consider the hardness of the hearts of that people; so he seems likewise to have very much suited the dispensation of the gospel and the method of our salvation, by the incarnation and sufferings of his Son, to the common prejudices of mankind; especially of the heathen world, whose minds were less prepared for this dispensation than the Jews, if we consider the light and advantages which the Jewish nation had above the gentile world: that so, by this means and method, he might wean them by degrees from their gross conceptions of things, and rectify more easily their wrong apprehensions, by gratifying them in some measure, and in a gracious compliance with our weakness, by bending and accommodating the way and method of our salvation to our weak capacity and imperfect conceptions of things.

Fourthly, And that God hath done this in the dispensation of the gospel, will, I think, very plainly appear in the following instances; in most of which I shall be very brief, and only insist somewhat more largely upon the last of them.

1st. The world was much given to admire mysteries in religion. The Jews had their's; several of which, by God's own appointment, were reserved and kept secret in a great measure from the people;

others were added by the superstition of after ages, and held in equal or rather greater veneration than the former: and the heathen likewise had their's; the devil always affecting to imitate God so far as served his wicked and malicious design of seducing mankind into idolatry and the worship of himself: and therefore the Scripture always speaks of the heathen idolatry as "the worship of devils, and not of God:" so that almost every nation had their peculiar and celebrated mysteries; most of which were either very odd and fantastical, or very lewd and impure, or very inhuman and cruel, and every way unworthy of the Deity.

But the great mystery of the christian religion, the incarnation of the Son of God; or, as the apostle calls it, "God manifested in the flesh;" was such a mystery, as, for the greatness and wonderfulness, for the infinite mercy and condescension of it, did obscure and swallow up all other mysteries. For which reason, the apostle, in allusion to the heathen mysteries and in contempt of them, speaking of the great mystery of the christian religion, says, "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh," &c. Since the world had such an admiration for mysteries, he instanceth in that which was a mystery indeed: a mystery beyond all dispute and beyond all comparison.

1 Tim. iii. 16.

2dly. There was likewise a great inclination in mankind to the worship of a visible and sensible Deity: and this was a main root and source of the various idolatries in the heathen world. Now, to take men off from this, God was pleased to appear in our nature; that they, who were so fond of a visible Deity, might have one to whom they might pay

Divine worship without danger of idolatry, and without injury to the Divine nature; even a true and natural image of God the Father, the fountain of the Deity; or, as the apostle to the Hebrews describes the Son of God, the resplendency or "brightness of his Father's glory, and the express" character or "image of his person." Heb. i. 3.

3dly. Another notion which had generally obtained among mankind, was concerning the expiation of the sins of men, and appeasing the offended Deity by sacrifice, upon which they supposed the punishment due to the sinner was transferred, to exempt him from it: especially by the sacrifices of men, which had almost universally prevailed in the gentile world.

And this notion of the expiation of sin by sacrifices of one kind or other, seems to have obtained very early in the world, and among all other ways of Divine worship to have found the most universal reception in all times and places. And, indeed, a great part of the Jewish religion and worship was a plain condescension to the general apprehensions of men concerning this way of appeasing the Deity by sacrifice: and the greatest part of the pagan religion and worship was likewise founded upon the same notion and opinion; which, because it was so universal, seems to have had its original from the first parents of mankind; either immediately after the creation, or after the flood; and from thence, I mean as to the substance of this notion, to have been derived and propagated to all their posterity.

And with this general notion of mankind, whatever the ground and foundation of it might be, God was pleased so far to comply, as once for all to

have a general atonement made for the sins of all mankind by the sacrifice of his only Son, whom his wise providence did permit by wicked hands to be crucified and slain. But I shall not at present insist any further upon this; which requires a particular discourse by itself, and may by God's assistance in due time have it.

4thly. Another very common notion, and very rife in the heathen world, and a great source of their idolatry, was their apotheosis, or canonizing of famous and eminent persons, who in their lifetime had done great things, and some way or other been great benefactors to mankind, by advancing them after their death to the dignity of an inferior kind of gods fit to be worshipped by men here on earth, and to have their prayers and supplications addressed to them as proper and powerful mediators and intercessors for them with the superior gods: to these they gave the titles of heroes and *semi-dei*, that is *half-gods:* though the notion of a being that is just half infinite seems to me very hard to be conceived and defined.

Now to take men off from this kind of idolatry, and to put an end to it, behold One in our nature exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, to be worshipped by men and angels: One that was the truly great benefactor of mankind: One that "was dead and is alive again, and lives for evermore to make intercession for us."

5thly. To give but one instance more, which I have already intimated: the world was mightily bent upon addressing their requests and supplications, not to the Deity immediately, because their superstition thought that too great a presumption, but by some mediators between the gods and them,

who might with advantage in this humble manner present their request so as to find acceptance. To this end they made use of the demons, or angels, and of their heroes, or deified men, whom I mentioned before, by whom they put up their prayers to the supreme gods, hoping by their intercession, and patronage of their cause, to obtain a gracious answer of them.

In a gracious compliance with this common apprehension, and thereby more easily and effectually to extirpate this sort of idolatry, which had been so long and so generally practised in the world, God was pleased to constitute and appoint One in our nature to be a perpetual advocate and intercessor in heaven for us, to offer up our prayers to God his Father, and to obtain mercy for us, "and grace to help in time of need."

And for ever to take us off from all other mediators, we are expressly told in Scripture, that as there is but one God to whom we are to pray, so there is but "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," by whom we are to offer up our prayers to God: and that we need not look out for any other, since the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that he "is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, seeing he lives for ever to make intercession for us." 1 Tim. ii. 5. Heb. vii. 25.

And for this reason the church of Rome is altogether inexcusable in this point, for introducing more mediators and intercessors, more patrons and advocates in heaven for us: and this, not only without any necessity, for who can add any virtue or efficacy to the powerful and prevalent intercession of the Son of God? but likewise in direct contradiction to the express constitution and appointment

of God himself, who says there is "but one mediator between God and man," and they say there ought to be many more, not only the blessed Virgin, but all the saints and angels in heaven. Besides that, by this very thing they revive one notorious piece of the old pagan idolatry, which God so plainly designed to extinguish by appointing "one only mediator between God and men."

By this condescension likewise God hath given us the comfortable assurance of a most powerful and a perpetual intercessor at the right hand of God in our behalf. For if we consider Christ as man, and of the same nature with us, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, so very nearly allied and related to us, we may easily believe, that he hath a most tender care and concernment for us; that he sincerely wisheth our happiness, and will by all means seek to procure it, if we ourselves by our own wilful obstinacy do not hinder it, and resist the kindness and the counsel of God against ourselves: for if we be resolved to continue impenitent, there is no help for us; we must "die in our sins," and salvation itself cannot save us.

But to proceed: It cannot surely but be matter of greatest consolation to us, that "the man Christ Jesus," who is now so "highly exalted at the right hand of God," and who hath "all power in heaven and earth committed to him," is our patron and advocate in heaven to plead our cause with God: since we cannot but think, that He who was pleased to become brother to us all, does bear a true affection and good-will to us: and that he who assumed our nature will heartily espouse our cause, and plead it powerfully for us, and will with all possible advantage recommend our petitions and requests to God.

But then, if we consider further that he did not only take our nature, but likewise took our infirmities, and bore them many years, in which he had long and continual experience of the saddest sufferings to which human nature is subject in this world, and "was tempted in all things like as we are:" this gives us still greater assurance, that He who suffered and was tempted himself, cannot but be touched with a lively sense of our infirmities, and must have learned by his own sufferings to compassionate our's, and to be ready to succour us when we are tempted, and to afford us grace and help suitable to all our wants and infirmities; for nothing gives us so just a sense of the sufferings of others, as the remembrance of our own, and the bitter experience of the like sufferings and temptations in ourselves.

And this the apostle to the Hebrews doth very particularly insist upon as matter of greatest comfort and encouragement to us, that the Son of God did not only assume our nature, "but was made in all things like unto us," and during his abode here upon earth did suffer and "was tempted like as we are:" "For verily," says the apostle, "he took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham: wherefore, in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God: for in that he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Heb. ii. 16, 17, 18.

And again, exhorting the Jews who were newly converted to Christianity, to continue steadfast in their profession, notwithstanding all the sufferings to which upon that account they were exposed; he comforts them with this consideration, that we

have at the right hand of God so powerful an advocate and intercessor for us as the Son of God, who is sensible of our case, having suffered the same things himself; and therefore we cannot doubt of his compassion to us, and readiness to support us in the like sufferings: "Seeing then," says he, "that we have a great high-priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession: for we have not an high-priest, that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin:" from whence he concludes, that having such an intercessor we may with great confidence and assurance address our supplications to God, for his mercy and help in all our wants and weakness, to supply the one and to assist the other: "Let us therefore," says he, "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need, *χάριν εἰς εὔκαιρον βοήθειαν*, grace for seasonable relief."

Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16.

So that our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, now that he is advanced to heaven, and exalted to the right hand of God, is not unmindful of us in this height of his glory and greatness; but with the tenderest affection and compassion to mankind, doth still prosecute the design of our salvation; and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and sufferings, which he presents to God continually, he offers up our prayers to him, and pleads our cause with him, and represents to him all our wants and necessities, and procures for us a favourable answer of our prayers, and supplies of grace and strength proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And thus, by virtue of this prevalent intercession

of his with God for us, our sins are forgiven, and our wants supplied, and our requests granted, and the gracious assistance and supports of God's Holy Spirit are seasonably afforded to us, and we are "kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation:" in a word, all those blessings and benefits are procured for us by his intercession in heaven, which he purchased for us by his blood upon earth.

So that in this method of our salvation, besides many other gracious condescensions which God hath made to the weakness and prejudices of mankind, our blessed Saviour hath perfectly supplied the two great wants concerning which mankind was at so great a loss before, namely, the want of an effectual expiatory sacrifice for sin upon earth, and of a prevalent mediator and intercessor with God in heaven.

And he hath, in great goodness and condescension to our inveterate prejudices concerning these things, taken effectual care fully to supply both these wants; having "appeared in the end of the world to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" and in virtue of that sacrifice appearing now in heaven "in the presence of God for us," he is become our perpetual advocate and a most prevalent intercessor with God on our behalf.

For, instead of the various and endless sacrifices of the Jews and heathens, the Son of God hath, "by one sacrifice for sins, perfected for ever them that are sanctified:" and instead of the mediation of demons and heroes, to offer up our prayers to God, which were the intercessors made use of among the heathen, we have "one mediator between God and men," appointed by God himself, even the Son of

God, who " is entered into heaven itself," there to " appear in the presence of God for us:" and to assure us that he commiserates our case, and hath a true and tender sense of our infirmities and sufferings, the very manner of his intercession for us, as the Scripture represents it to us, is a plain demonstration of the thing: for he intercedes for us in heaven by representing to God his Father his sufferings upon earth; and pleading them in our behalf: so that the very argument which he useth to God for us cannot but stir up compassion in him towards us, and whilst he represents his own sufferings in our behalf, we cannot think, that he is unmindful and insensible of our's.

You see then that in this dispensation of God for our salvation, by sending his Son in our nature, things that are not only suited in great condescension to our apprehensions, but are likewise in great compassion to us every way fitted for our comfort and encouragement. God hath made him our great patron and advocate who was our sacrifice and propitiation. And surely we have all the reason in the world to believe, that He who, " in the days of his flesh, humbled himself, and became obedient to the death" for our sakes, will be ready to do us all good offices now that he is advanced to the right hand of God; that He, who died for us upon earth, now that he lives again, will make intercession for us in heaven, and perfect that salvation which he purchased for us upon the cross.

And therefore we find in Scripture, that as the purchasing of our salvation is ascribed to the death and sufferings of Christ, so the perfecting of it is attributed to his intercession for us at the right hand of his Father: " Wherefore," says the apostle to

the Hebrews, "he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, seeing he liveth for ever to make intercession for us:" he died once to purchase these benefits, but he lives for ever to procure them for us, and to apply them to us: and now that he is in heaven, he is as intent upon our concernment, and lays our happiness as much to heart, as when he dwelt here among us on earth, and poured out his blood a sacrifice for sin upon the cross: and that when he lived here below, he suffered and was tempted as we are; this very consideration gives us the greatest assurance possible that he is still touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and hath a lively sense of our sufferings; and consequently, that he doth compassionate our case, and will use all his power and interest for our advantage, for our seasonable support and succour in all our trials and sufferings. But, besides the wonderful condescension of this dispensation, there is, likewise, in the

Fifth and last place, a great congruity and fitness in the thing itself; and this method of our salvation which the wisdom of God hath pitched upon, is in many other respects very much for our real benefit and comfort. For by this means we have a perfect and familiar example of holiness and obedience in our own nature, by which we plainly see, that God requires nothing of us, but what he himself, when he submitted to become man, did think fit to do: for being made of a woman, he was of necessity made under the law, and by assuming human nature, he became naturally subject to the laws and conditions of his being.

And here likewise is a provision made for the expiation and forgiveness of our sins, in a way not only very honourable to the justice of God and the

authority of his laws, but likewise very effectual to discountenance sin and to deter men from it; since God did not think fit to forgive the sins of men without great sufferings, and that in our nature: for though God was willing to save the sinner, yet, rather than encouragement should be given to sin by letting it go unpunished, he was contented to give up the dearly beloved of his soul to be a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

By the same means also we have a most powerful antidote against the fear of suffering, and particularly against the fear of death, one of the greatest slaveries of human nature: so also the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, "that for this cause Christ himself also took part of flesh and blood, that by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Heb. ii. 14, 15.

Again, we have hereby full assurance of a blessed immortality in another life, because in our nature, death and all the powers of darkness were baffled and overcome. The death of Christ, which could not have been without his incarnation, and likewise his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, are sensible demonstrations to all mankind of a blessed immortality after death; which is the most powerful motive in the world to obedience and a holy life.

And lastly, we may upon this account promise to ourselves a fair and equal trial at the judgment of the great day, because we shall then be judged by a man like ourselves. Our Saviour and judge himself hath told us, that for this reason "God hath committed all judgment to

John v. 22. 27.

the Son, because he is the Son of man." And this in human judgments is accounted a great privilege, to be judged by those who are of the same rank and condition with ourselves, and who are likely to understand best and most carefully to examine and consider all our circumstances, and to render our case as if it were their own.

So equitably doth God deal with us, that we shall be acquitted or condemned by such a judge as, according to human measures, we ourselves should have chosen; by one in our own nature "who was made in all things like unto us," that only excepted which would have rendered him incapable of being our judge, because it would have made him a criminal like ourselves. And therefore the apostle offers this as a firm ground of assurance to us, that "God will judge the world in righteousness," because this judgment shall be administered by a man like ourselves; "he hath (said he) appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained," &c.

I shall now only make a practical inference or two from what hath been delivered upon this argument, and so conclude this whole discourse.

First, The serious consideration of what hath been said concerning the incarnation of our blessed Saviour, should effectually prevail with us to comply with the great end and design of the Son of God's becoming man and dwelling amongst us, and of his doing and suffering all those things which are recorded of him in the history of his life and death written by the holy evangelists: I say, the consideration hereof should persuade us all to comply with the great design of all this, which is the reformation of mankind and the recovery of us

out of that sinful and miserable estate into which we were fallen: because the salvation which the Son of God hath purchased for us, and which he offers to us by the gospel, is not to be accomplished and brought about any other way than by forsaking our sins and reforming our lives. "The grace of God, which hath appeared to all men and brings salvation," will not make us partakers of it any other way, nor by any other means, than by "teaching us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world." God sent his Son Jesus to bless us, "by turning us away every one from his iniquities;" and unless this change be effectually wrought in us, we are utterly incapable of all the blessings of the gospel of Christ. All that he hath done for us without us will avail us nothing, unless we be inwardly transformed "and renewed in the spirit of our minds;" unless we become new creatures; unless we make it the continual and sincere endeavour of our lives to "keep the commandments of God."

For the Scripture is most express and positive in this matter; that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" that "every man that hath this hope in him," that is, in Christ, to be saved by him, must "purify himself even as he is pure." We do not rightly and truly believe "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," if we be not also thoroughly convinced, that it is as necessary for us to leave our sins, as to believe this most faithful and credible saying.

Heb. xii. 14.
1 John iii. 3.

The obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour are indeed "accounted to us for righteousness," and will most certainly redound to our unspeakable

benefit and advantage, upon our performance of the condition which the gospel doth require on our part; namely, that "every man that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity:" and the grace of God's Holy Spirit is ready to enable us to perform this condition, if we earnestly ask it, and do sincerely co-operate with it: provided we do what we can on our part, God will not be wanting to us on his. But if we "receive the grace of God in vain, and take no care to perform the condition, and do neglect to implore the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit to that purpose, we have none to blame but ourselves; because it is then wholly our own fault if we fall short of that happiness which Christ hath purchased, and promised to us upon such easy and reasonable conditions as the gospel proposeth.

But I no where find that God hath promised to force happiness upon the negligent, and a reward upon the "wicked and slothful servant:" a gift may be given for nothing, but surely a reward does in the very nature of it always suppose some service. None but a righteous man is capable of "a righteous man's reward:" and St. John hath sufficiently cautioned us not to think ourselves righteous, unless we be "doers of righteousness:" "Little children (says he), let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." This is so very plain a text, that if men were not either very easy to be deceived by others, or very willing to deceive themselves, they could not possibly mistake the meaning of it: and therefore I will repeat it once more—"Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous."

1 John iii. 7.

Secondly, The other inference which I would make from the precedent discourse is this—that with all possible thankfulness we should acknowledge and adore the wonderful goodness and condescension of Almighty God, in sending his only-begotten Son into the world in our nature, to be made flesh, and to dwell amongst us, in order to our recovery and salvation: a method and dispensation not only full of mercy and goodness, but of great condescension to our meanness, and of mighty virtue and efficacy for our redemption and deliverance from the guilt and dominion of sin; and upon all accounts every way so much for our benefit and advantage. So that well may we say with St. Paul, "this is a faithful saying," πιστὸς λόγος, a credible word, "and worthy of all acceptation," that is, fit to be embraced and entertained with all possible joy and thankfulness, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

What an everlasting fountain of the most invaluable blessings and benefits to mankind is the incarnation of the Son of God! his vouchsafing to assume our nature, and to reside and converse so long with us! and what are we, that the eternal and only-begotten Son of God should condescend to do all this for us? that the high and glorious Majesty of heaven should stoop down to the earth, and be contented to be clothed with misery and mortality? that he should submit to so poor and low a condition, to such dreadful and disgraceful sufferings for our sakes? for what are we? vile and despicable creatures, guilty and unworthy offenders and apostates, enemies and rebels. Blessed God! how great is thy goodness! how infinite are thy tender mercies and compassions to mankind! that thou

shouldst regard us whilst we neglected thee, and remember us in our low condition, when we had forgotten thee days without number, and shouldst take such pity on us when we shewed none to ourselves; and whilst we were thy declared and implacable enemies, should express more kindness and goodwill to us, than the best of men ever did to their best friends!

When we reflect seriously upon those great things which God hath done in our behalf, and consider that mighty salvation which God hath wrought for us; what thanks can we possibly render, what acknowledgment shall we ever be able to make, I do not say equal, but in any wise meet and becoming, to this great Benefactor of mankind? who, when we had so highly offended and provoked him, and so foolishly and so fatally undone ourselves; when we were become so guilty and so miserable, and so much fitter to have eternally been the objects of his wrath and indignation than of his pity and compassion, was pleased to send his own, his only Son into the world to seek and save us; and by him to repair all our ruins, to forgive all our iniquities, to heal all our spiritual diseases, and to crown us with loving-kindness and tender mercies?

And what sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving should we also offer up to this gracious and most merciful Redeemer of our's, the everlasting Son of the Father, who debased himself so infinitely for our sakes, and "when he took upon him to deliver man, did not abhor the Virgin's womb?" who was contented to be born so obscurely, and to live all his life in a poor and persecuted condition; and was pleased both to undergo and to "overcome the sharpness of death, that he might open the kingdom of heaven to all believers?"

Every time we have occasion to meditate upon this, especially when we are communicating at his holy table, and receiving the blessed symbols and pledges of his precious death and passion; how should our hearts burn within us and leap for joy? How should the remembrance of it revive and raise our spirits, and put us into an ecstacy of love and gratitude to this great friend and lover of souls? And with the "blessed mother of our Lord," how should our souls, upon that blessed occasion, "magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour?"

The holy men of old were transported with joy at the obscure and confused apprehension and remote foresight of so great a blessing, at so great a distance: it is said of Abraham, the father of the faithful, "that he saw his day afar off, and was glad." How should we then be affected with joy and thankfulness, to whom the Son of God and blessed Saviour of men is actually come? he is come many ages ago, and hath enlightened a great part of the world with his glory. Yea, he is come to us, who were in a manner separated from the rest of the world: to us is this great Light come, who had so long sat "in darkness and in the shadow of death:" and this mighty salvation which he hath wrought for us is near to every one of us that is willing to lay hold of it, and to accept it upon those gracious terms and conditions upon which it is offered to us in his holy gospel.

And by his coming he hath delivered mankind from that gross ignorance and "thick darkness which covered the nations: and we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true: and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus

1 John v. 20.

Christ: this is the true God and eternal life." And then it immediately follows, "little children, keep yourselves from idols." What Ver. 21. can be the meaning of this caution? and what is the connexion of it with the foregoing discourse? it is plainly this—that the Son of God by his coming had rescued mankind from the sottish worship of idols; and therefore he cautions Christians to take great heed of relapsing into idolatry by worshipping a creature, or the image or likeness of any creature, instead of God. And because he foresaw that it might be objected to Christians, as in fact it was afterwards by the heathen, that the worship of Christ, who was a man, was as much idolatry as that which the Christians charged the heathens withal; therefore, St. John, effectually to prevent the force of this plausible objection, though he perpetually throughout his Gospel declares Christ to be really a man, yet he expressly also affirms him to be God and the true God; and consequently, Christians might safely pay Divine worship to him without fear or danger of idolatry: "We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ: this is the true God and eternal life: little children, keep yourselves from idols."

But this I am sensible is a digression, yet such an one as may not be altogether useless.

To proceed then in the recital of those great blessings which the coming of the Son of God hath brought to mankind. He hath rescued us from the bondage of sin, and from the slavery of Satan: he hath openly proclaimed pardon and reconciliation to the world: he hath clearly revealed eternal life to us, which was but obscurely made known before, both to Jews and gentiles; "but is now made

manifest by the appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel:" he hath purchased this great blessing for us: and is ready to confer it upon us, if we will be contented to leave our sins and to be saved by him: a condition without which as salvation is not to be had, so if it were, it would not be desirable, it could not make us happy; because our sins would still separate between God and us, and the guilt and horror of our minds would make us eternally miserable.

And now surely we cannot but thus judge, that all the praises and acknowledgments, all the service and obedience, which we can possibly render to him, are infinitely beneath those infinite obligations which the Son of God hath laid upon the sons of men, by his "coming into the world to save sinners."

What then remains, but that at all times, and more especially at this season, we gratefully acknowledge and joyfully commemorate this great and amazing goodness of God to us, in the incarnation of his Son for the redemption and salvation of the sinful and miserable race of mankind? a method and dispensation of the Divine grace and wisdom, not only full of mercy and condescension, but of great power and virtue to purify our hearts and to reform our lives; to beget in us a fervent love of God our Saviour, and a perfect hatred and detestation of our sins, and a steadfast purpose and resolution to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking in his ways all the days of our life. In a word, a method that is every way calculated for our unspeakable benefit and comfort.

Since then the Son of God hath so graciously

condescended to be "made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted;" let us aspire to be as like to him as is possible in the exemplary holiness and virtues of his life. We cannot be like him in his miracles, but we may in his mercy and compassion: we cannot imitate his Divine power, but we may resemble him in his innocency and humility, in his meekness and patience. And as he assumed human nature, so let us re-assume humanity, which we have in great measure depraved and put off; and let us put on bowels of mercy towards those that are in misery, and be ready to relieve the poor for His sake, "who, being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."

To conclude: Let us imitate him in that which was his great work and business here upon earth, and which of all other did best become the Son of God—I mean in his going about doing good: that, by giving glory to God in the highest, and by endeavouring as much as in us lies, to procure and promote peace on earth, and good-will amongst men, we may at last be "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;" through the mercies and merits of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SERMON XLVII.

CONCERNING THE SACRIFICE AND SATISFACTION OF CHRIST, &c.

But now once hath he appeared in the end of the world, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. —HEB. ix. 26.

AMONG many other great ends and reasons for which God was pleased to send his Son into the world to dwell amongst us, this was one of the chief—that, by a long course of the greatest innocency and the greatest sufferings in our nature, he might be capable to make a perfect expiation of sin: "but now once in the end of the world," ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, in the conclusion of the ages, that is, in the last age of the world, which is the gospel age, "hath he appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

The general design of God in the sending his Son into the world was to save mankind from eternal death and misery, and to purchase for us eternal life and happiness. So the Author of our salvation himself tells us, "That God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John iii. 16.

Now in order to the procuring of this salvation for us, the impediments and hinderances of it were to be removed: these were the guilt and the dominion of sin. By the guilt of sin we were become

obnoxious to the wrath of God and to eternal condemnation, and by the defilement and dominion of it we were incapable of the happiness of heaven and the reward of eternal life.

To remove these two great hinderances, two things were necessary: the forgiveness of sins past in order to our deliverance from the wrath of God and the eternal torments of the next life; and the reformation of our hearts and lives to make us capable of eternal life and happiness in another world. And both these, if God had so pleased, might, for any thing we certainly know to the contrary, have been effected by the abundant mercy and powerful grace of God, without this wonderful method and dispensation of sending his Son in our nature "to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself:" but it seems the wisdom of God thought fit to pitch upon this way and method of our salvation, and no doubt for good reasons; amongst which these three seem to be very obvious and very considerable.

First, To vindicate the honour of his laws, which if sin had gone altogether unpunished would have been in great danger of falling into contempt. For if God had proclaimed a general pardon of sin to all mankind without any testimony of his wrath and displeasure against it, who would have had any great veneration for his laws, or have believed in good earnest, that the violation of them had either been so extremely offensive to him, or so very dangerous to the sinner?

Therefore, to maintain the honour of his laws, rather than sin should pass unpunished, God would lay the punishment of it upon his only-begotten Son, the dearest person to him in the world: which is a greater testimony of his high displeasure against

sin, and of his tender regard and concernment for the honour of his laws, than if the sinner had suffered the punishment due to it in his own person.

Secondly, Another reason of this dispensation, and that likewise very considerable, was, that God might forgive sin in such a way as yet effectually to discountenance and discourage it, and to create in us the greatest horror and hatred of it: which could not have been by an absolute pardon, without any punishment inflicted, or satisfaction made to the honour of his justice. For had sin been so easily forgiven, who would have been sensible of the great evil of it, or afraid to offend for the future?

But when God makes his own Son a sacrifice, and lays upon him the punishment due for the iniquities of us all, this is a demonstration that God hates sin as much, if it be possible, as he loved his own Son. For this plainly shews what sin deserves, and what the sinner may justly expect, if, after this severity of God against it, he will venture to commit it.

And if this sacrifice for sin, and the pardon purchased by it, be not effectual to reclaim us from sin, and to beget in us an eternal dread and detestation of it; if we sin wilfully after so clear a revelation of the "wrath of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," there remains "no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume the adversaries." For what could God do more to testify his displeasure against sin, and to discountenance the practice of it, than to make his only Son an offering for sin, and to give him up to be wounded for our transgressions, and

bruised for our iniquities? In what clearer glass can we at once behold the great evil and demerit of sin, and the infinite goodness and mercy of God to sinners, than in the sorrows and sufferings of the Son of God for our sins and for our sakes?

Thirdly, Another reason of this dispensation seems to have been a gracious condescension and compliance of Almighty God with a certain apprehension and persuasion, which had very early and universally obtained among mankind, concerning the expiation of sin and appeasing the offended Deity by sacrifices: by the sacrifices of living creatures, of birds and beasts; and afterwards by human sacrifices, and the blood of their sons and daughters: by offering to God, as the expression is in the prophet, "their first-born for their transgression, and the fruit of their body for the sin of their souls."

And this notion of the expiation of sin by sacrifice, whether it had its first rise from Divine revelation, and was afterwards propagated from age to age by tradition: I say, from whencesoever this notion came, it hath of all other notions concerning religion, excepting those of the being of God and his providence, and of the recompences of another life, found the most universal reception, and the thing hath been the most generally practised in all ages and nations, not only in the old, but in the new discovered parts of the world.

And indeed a very great part of the Jewish religion, which was instituted by God himself, seems to have been a plain condescension to the general apprehension of mankind, concerning this way of appeasing the offended Deity by sacrifices; as it was also a figure of that great and efficacious sa-

crifice which should in due time be offered to God, to make atonement once for all for the sins of mankind.

And the apostle to the Hebrews doth very particularly insist upon this condescension of God to them in the dispensation of the gospel: and whereas they apprehended so great a necessity of a high-priest, and of sacrifices to make expiation for the sins of the people, that it was an established principle among them, that "without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins;" God was pleased to comply so far with these notions and apprehensions of their's, as to make his own Son both a priest and a sacrifice, to do that once for all which their own high-priest pretended to do year by year.

And from hence the same apostle takes occasion to recommend to them the new covenant and dispensation of the gospel, as having a greater and more perfect high-priest, and a more excellent sacrifice, than were the high-priests and the sacrifices under the law; the Son of God having by one sacrifice of himself obtained eternal redemption for us, and perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

And this apprehension prevailed no less in the heathen world, and proceeded to the sacrifices of men, even of their first-born. And with this apprehension, not to countenance but to abolish it, God was pleased to comply so far as to make a general atonement for the sins of mankind by the death of his Son, appearing in our nature to become a voluntary sacrifice for us: God permitting him to be unjustly put to death, and his blood to be shed by the malice of men, in appearance as a malefactor, but in truth as a martyr; and accepting of his death as

a meritorious sacrifice and "propitiation for the sins of the whole world:" that, by this wise counsel and permission of his providence, he might for ever put an end to that barbarous and inhuman way of serving God, which had been so long in use and practice among them. The Son of God by the voluntary sacrifice of himself having effected all that at once, and for ever, which mankind from the beginning of the world had in vain been endeavouring to accomplish by innumerable and continual sacrifices; namely, the pardon of their sins, and perfect peace and reconciliation with God.

For these ends and reasons, and perhaps for many more as great and considerable as these, which our shallow understandings are not able to fathom, the wisdom of God hath pitched upon this way and method of delivering mankind from the guilt and dominion of sin, by the sacrifice of his Son. And to this end it was requisite that he should appear in our nature and dwell amongst us for some considerable time, that, by a long course of the greatest innocency and of the greatest sufferings in our nature, he might be capable of making a perfect expiation of sin.

So that two things were requisite to qualify him for this purpose—perfect innocency and obedience, and great sufferings in our nature, even to the suffering of death. Both these the Scripture declares to be necessary qualifications of a person capable to make expiation of sin; and both these were found in the person of our blessed Saviour.

First, Unspotted innocency and perfect obedience. This the Scripture testifies concerning him, and the whole course of his life and actions.

"He was in all points tempted like as Heb. iv. 15. John viii. 29. 1 Pet. ii. 22.

we are, yet without sin," saith the apostle to the Hebrews; "he always did the things which pleased God," as he testifies concerning himself, "and we are sure that his witness is true." "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," as St. Peter tells us of him. And this was necessary to qualify him for the perfect expiation of sin, whether we consider him as a priest, or as a sacrifice.

As a priest, he could not have been fit to make expiation for the sins of others, had he not been without sin himself. And this, the apostle tells us, is one great advantage of our high-priest under the gospel, above the high-priest under the law; who, being a sinner himself, as well as those for whom he offered, had need to offer for himself before he could make so much as a legal expiation for the sins of others: but a perfect and effectual expiation of sin, so as to purge the conscience from the guilt of it, cannot be made but by a high-priest who is holy and innocent himself; "For such an high-priest (saith the apostle) became us," that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel, when a perfect expiation of sins is to be made; such a high-priest is necessary, "as is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, who needs not as those high-priests," that is, as the high-priests under the law, "to offer up sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the people:" the plain force of which argument is this—that he who will be qualified to make atonement for the sins of others must be without sin himself.

Heb. vii. 26, 27.

And then if we consider Christ as a sacrifice for sin, perfect holiness is necessary to make a sacrifice acceptable and available for the expiation of sin. The necessity of this was typified by the quality of

the expiatory sacrifices under the law; the beasts that were to be offered were to be without spot and blemish. To which the apostle alludes, speaking of the quality and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ: "How much more (says he,) shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?" Heb. xi. 14. And to the same purpose St. Peter, "Forasmuch as ye know ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," &c. hereby intimating, that nothing less than the perfect innocency and holiness of Him who was to be a sacrifice for us could have expiated the guilt of our sins, and purchased eternal redemption for us. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

Secondly, Great sufferings likewise in our nature, even to the suffering of death, were requisite to the perfect expiation of sin: I say, even to the suffering of death. For the sacrifices which were to make expiation, were to be slain: and it was a constant maxim and principle among the Jews, and the apostle more than once in this Epistle seems to allow and confirm it, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins."

Not that God could not have pardoned sin without satisfaction made to his justice, either by the suffering of the sinner himself, or of a sacrifice in his stead; but, according to the method and dispensation which the wisdom of God had pitched upon, he was resolved not to dispense forgiveness in any other way. For which reason he seems either to have possessed mankind with this principle, or to have permitted them to be so persuaded, that sin

was not to be expiated but by blood; that is, either by the death of the sinner or of the sacrifice.

Now the life of our blessed Saviour, as well as his death, was made up of sufferings of one kind or other: continual sufferings from his cradle to his cross, from the time he drew his first breath to his giving up the ghost; and not only continual sufferings, but the greatest that ever were, considering the dignity of the person that suffered, and the nature of the sufferings; considering, likewise, that these sufferings were not only wholly undeserved on his part, but unmerited also on our's, for whose sake he submitted himself to them: nay, on the contrary, he had obliged to the utmost those for whom and by whom he suffered, and continued still to oblige them, by the greatest blessings and benefits purchased and procured for them by those very sufferings, which, with so much malice and cruelty, they inflicted on him.

Had our blessed Saviour been a mere man, the perfect innocency and unspotted purity of his whole life; his zeal to do the will of God, and his delight in doing it; his infinite pains and unwearied diligence in going about doing good; his constant obedience to God in the most difficult instances, and his perseverance in well-doing, notwithstanding the ill usage and hard measure, the bitter reproaches and persecutions he met withal for it, from a wicked and ill-natured world; his perfect submission to the will of God, his invincible patience under the greatest and bitterest sufferings, and his infinite charity to his enemies and persecutors; these must needs be highly acceptable to God, and, if man could merit of God, likely enough to be available for the sins of others.

But our Saviour and our sacrifice being the Son of God in our nature; and he voluntarily assuming it, and submitting to the condition of humanity in its lowest and most miserable state, sin only excepted; and his being contented to live a life of doing good and suffering evil, and at last to be put to death and slain a sacrifice for us; the dignity of the person who did and suffered all this for us, and his dearness to God, must needs add a mighty value to so perfect an obedience and such patient sufferings; so as to render them a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

And all this being willingly performed in our nature, and accepted by God as done upon our account, may reasonably be presumed to redound to our benefit and advantage, as much as if we ourselves had performed it in our own persons: nothing being so proper and so available to make an honourable amends and satisfaction to the justice of God for the sins of all mankind, as the voluntary obedience and sufferings of human nature in a person of so great dignity and dearness to God as his eternal and entirely-beloved Son.

Now, that expiation of sin was made by the sufferings of Christ in our stead, I shall endeavour to make good these three ways:

First, From plain testimonies of the Holy Scripture, declaring this matter to us as clearly and fully as it is possible for words to do it.

Secondly, From the nature and intention of expiatory sacrifices, both among the Jews and heathen; to which the death of Christ is in the New Testament so frequently compared, and in point of virtue and efficacy to take away sin infinitely preferred to it.

Thirdly, By vindicating this method and dispensation of the Divine wisdom from the objections which are brought against it; and by shewing that there is nothing in it that is unreasonable, or any wise unworthy of God.

I. I shall produce some plain testimonies of Holy Scripture, which declare this matter as clearly and fully as it is possible for words to do it; namely, that the Son of God, in order to the effectual expiation of sin, suffered in our stead, and bore the wrath of God for us, and made a perfect atonement for sin, and obtained eternal redemption for us.

This the Scripture declares to us in great variety of expressions; as, that "Christ died for us, and for our sins;" that he was "a sacrifice for us, and a propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" that is, of all mankind; that "he bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and "appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" that "we are justified in his blood," and "redeemed by the price of it;" and in very many other expressions to the same purpose.

And this is so evidently the scope and meaning of these expressions, that it cannot be denied without offering the greatest violence imaginable to the Holy Scriptures. For can any man think that God would have used so many expressions in Scripture, the plain and most obvious sense of all which is, that the Son of God suffered for our sins and in our stead, if this had not been his design and meaning? would not this be in effect to say, that God had written a great book to puzzle and confound, but not to instruct and teach mankind?

I will at present single out some few of those many texts of Scripture which might be produced to this purpose: "He hath

2 Cor. v. 21.

made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin;" that is, he hath made him who had no sin himself a sacrifice for our sins. Again; "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God." St. Peter to the same purpose tells us, that "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh." Here Christ is said to have suffered for sin: and to declare, that the apostle did not only mean that Christ suffered upon the occasion of our sins, but that he suffered in the place and stead of the sinner, he adds, the "just for the unjust;" that is, the Son of God, who was innocent and had no sin, suffered for us who were sinners; or as it is elsewhere expressed, "he bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

Eph. v. 2.

1 Pet. iii. 18.

It is true, indeed, that Christ suffered for our benefit and advantage: which the Socinians would have to be all that is meant in the text which I have cited: but then it ought to be considered, that Christ's suffering for our benefit and advantage does by no means exclude, nor is any wise inconsistent with, his suffering in our stead. For whoever suffers in another man's stead, and to save him from suffering, does undoubtedly suffer for his benefit and advantage, and gives the best demonstration of it that can be: but the manner of the expression, if compared with other parallel texts of Scripture, and especially with what is so often said of our Saviour's being a sacrifice, which I shall have occasion further to urge by and by; I say the manner of the expression, if well considered, will appear to any man that is not contentious, to signify our Saviour's suffering instead of the sinner.

But not to argue from words and phrases, I will produce two texts which declare this matter so plainly, that the force of them is not to be avoided without the most shameful wresting and perverting of them. "This is my commandment, (says our Saviour,) that you love one another, as I have loved you." How is that? he declares in the next words, "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend;" that is, that he be contented to die in his stead. And to the same purpose St. Paul, "For when ye were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly:" now the question is, whether, by this expression of Christ's dying for the ungodly, be meant only his dying for the benefit and advantage of sinners, but not his dying in their stead? this, let the words which immediately follow determine: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man one would even dare to die: but God commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us." And now I appeal to any man of good sense, whether it be not plain that the apostle here speaks of Christ's dying for sinners in the same sense as one man is said to die for another; that is, to save another from death; which what is it else but to die in his stead? he that can deny this, is perverse to the highest degree, and I fear almost beyond the possibility of being convinced.

John xv. 12, 13.

Rom. v. 6, 7, 8.

And the argument from these two texts is so much the stronger, because we do not here reason merely from the phrase and expression, but from the main scope of our Saviour's discourse in the one, and of St. Paul's in the other. For the design of both is to recommend the superlative love of Christ

to us above the greatest love that ever any man expressed to another. The highest pitch that human affection did ever rise to, was for a man to lay down his life for his friend; but the Son of God laid down his life for his enemies. "Scarcely (says St. Paul,) would one lay down his life for a righteous man," that is, for one who is but strictly just and honest, and does nobody wrong; but for a good man—that is, for one that is kind and beneficial to all, and hath obliged mankind by great benefits—some one may be found that would lay down his life to save the life of such a person: but the love of Christ hath gone far beyond this: he died for sinners; for those who were neither good men nor righteous: "but God commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Now where doth the force of this argument lie, if not in this?—that Christ hath done that for us, who were enemies and sinners, which some very few persons in the world have done for their friend, or for some very eminently-good man: and what is that? why they have laid down their lives in their stead: and so Christ hath done for us. This seems to be so very plain, that I do not see how the force of this argument is possible to be avoided.

It is evident then from Scripture, that Christ died not only for our advantage but in our stead; as truly and really as any man ever did or can die for another, who lays down his own life to save another from death. For if Christ had not died, we had perished everlastingly; and because he died, we are saved from eternal death and misery.

And though this be nowhere in Scripture spoken of by the name or term of satisfaction, yet it is said to be the price of our redemption; which surely is

the same in effect with satisfaction. For as we are sinners we are liable, and, as I may say, indebted to the justice of God: and the Son of God, by his death and sufferings in our nature, hath discharged this obligation, and paid this debt for us: which discharge, since it was obtained for us by the shedding of Christ's blood, and the Scripture tells us, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins;" and since God is graciously pleased to accept of it for the debt which we owed to his justice, and to declare himself fully pleased and contented with it; why it may not properly enough be called payment or satisfaction, I confess I am not able to understand. Men may eternally wrangle about any thing; but what a frivolous contention, what a trifling in serious matters, what barretry in divinity is this?

Not that God was angry with his Son, when he thus laid on him the iniquities of us all: no, he was always well pleased with him; and never better, than when he "became obedient to the death, even the death of the cross," and "bore our sins in his own body on the tree."

Nor yet that our Saviour suffered the very same that the sinner should have suffered, namely, the proper pains and torment of the damned; but that his obedience and sufferings were of that value and esteem with God, and his voluntary sacrifice of himself so well pleasing to him, that he thereupon entered into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind, wherein he hath engaged himself to forgive the sins of those who believe and repent, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence the blood of Christ which was shed for us upon the cross is called "the blood of the covenant," as being the

sanction of that new covenant, into which God is entered with mankind: and not only the sanction and confirmation of that covenant, but the very foundation of it: for which reason the cup in the Lord's supper is called the "new testament," or, as the word should rather be rendered, the "new covenant in his blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins." I proceed now, to the

II. Second thing propounded, which was to shew that the expiation of our sins was made by the sufferings of Christ, from the nature and intention of expiatory sacrifices, both among the Jews and heathens; to which the death of Christ is in the New Testament so frequently compared, and in point of virtue and efficacy to take away sin infinitely preferred to it.

Now the nature and design of expiatory sacrifices was plainly this:—To substitute one living creature to suffer and die instead of another, so that what the sinner deserved to have suffered was supposed to be done to the sacrifice, that is, it was slain to make an atonement for the sinner.

And though there was no reason to hope for any such effect from the blood of bulls or goats, or of any other living creatures that were wont to be offered up in sacrifice; yet that both Jews and heathens did expect and hope for it, is so very evident, that it cannot without extreme ignorance or obstinacy be denied.

But this expectation, how unreasonable soever, plainly shews it to have been the common apprehension of mankind, in all ages, that God would not be appeased, nor should sin be pardoned, without suffering: but yet so that men generally conceived good hopes, that, upon the repentance of sinners, God would accept of a vicarious punishment; that

is, of the suffering of some other in their stead. And very probably, as I said before, in compliance with this apprehension of mankind, and in condescension to it, as well as for other weighty reasons best known to the Divine wisdom, God was pleased to find out such a sacrifice as should really and effectually procure for them, that great blessing of the forgiveness of sins, which they had so long hoped for from the multitude of their own sacrifices.

And the apostle to the Hebrews doth in a large discourse shew the great virtue and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, to the purpose of remission of sins, above that of the sacrifices under the law; and that the death of Christ is really and effectually to our advantage all that which the sacrifices under the law were supposed to be to the sinner: "But now once (says the apostle here in the text,) in the end of the world, hath he appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself." This is the great virtue and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, that whatever was expected from any other sacrifices, either by Jews or heathens, was really effected by this.

This was plainly signified by the Jewish passover, wherein the lamb was slain and the sinner did escape, and was passed by. In allusion whereto, St. Paul makes no scruple to call Christ our passover, or paschal lamb, who was slain that we might escape: "Christ our passover (says he) is slain (or offered) for us;" that is, he, by the gracious appointment of God, was substituted to suffer all that in our stead which the paschal lamb was supposed to suffer for the sinner.

1 Cor. v. 7.

And this was likewise signified by the sinner's laying his hand upon the sacrifice that was to be slain, thereby as it were transferring the punishment

which was due to himself, upon the sacrifice that was to be slain and offered up. For so God tells Moses, that the sinner who came to offer an expiatory sacrifice should do: "He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering and it shall be accepted for him, to make an atonement for him." Lev. i. 4. And the apostle tells us, that it was an established principle in the Jewish religion, that "without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins:" which plainly shews, that they expected this benefit, of the remission of sins, from the blood of their sacrifices.

And then he tells us, that we are really made partakers of this benefit by the blood of Christ, and by the virtue of his sacrifice: and again, "Christ (says he) was once offered to bear the sins of many;" Heb. ix. 28. plainly alluding to the sacrifices under the law, which did, as it were, bear the faults of the sinner.

And that this expression, of Christ's being offered to bear our sins, cannot be meant of his taking away our sins by his holy doctrine, which was confirmed by his death, but of his bearing our sins by way of imputation, and by his suffering for them in our stead, as the sacrifice was supposed to do for the sinner: this, I say, is evident beyond all denial from the opposition which follows after the text, between his first appearance and his second: "Christ (says our apostle,) was once offered to bear our sins; but unto them that look for him he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. ix. 28. Why? Did he not appear the first time without sin? Yes, certainly, as to any inherent guilt; for the Scripture tells us he had no sin. What then is the meaning of the opposition—that

at his first coming he bore our sins, but at his second coming he shall appear without sin unto salvation? These words can have no other imaginable sense but this—that at his first coming he sustained the person of a sinner and suffered instead of us; but his second coming shall be upon another account, and "he shall appear without sin unto salvation;" that is, not as a sacrifice, but as a judge, to confer the reward of eternal life upon those who are partakers of the benefit of that sacrifice which he offered to God for us in "the days of his flesh." I proceed to the

III. Third thing I proposed, and which yet remains to be spoken to; namely, to vindicate this method and dispensation of the Divine wisdom from the objections which are brought against it; and to shew, that there is nothing in it that is unreasonable, or any wise unworthy of God. I shall mention four objections which are commonly urged in this matter, and I think they are all that are considerable.

Object. I. First, That this method of the expiation of sin by the sufferings of Christ, seems to argue some defect and want of goodness in God, as if he needed some external motive, and were not of himself disposed to forgive sinners.

To which I think the answer is not difficult; namely, that God did not want goodness to have forgiven sin freely and without any satisfaction, but his wisdom did not think it meet to give encouragement to sin by too easy a forgiveness, and without some remarkable testimony of his severe displeasure against it: and therefore his greater goodness and compassion to mankind devised this way to save the sinner, without giving the least countenance and encouragement to sin.

For God to think of saving us any way, was ex-

cessive goodness and mercy; but to think of doing it in this way, by substituting his dearly-beloved Son to suffer in our stead, is a condescension so very amazing, that if God had not been pleased of his own goodness to stoop to it, it had almost been blasphemy in man to have thought of it or desired it.

Obj. II. Secondly, How can our sins be said to have been forgiven freely, if the pardon of them was purchased at so dear a rate, and so mighty a price was paid for it?

In answer to this I desire these two things may be considered. 1st. That it is a wonderful grace and favour of God to admit of this translation of the punishment which was due to us, and to accept of the sufferings of another in our stead, and for our benefit; when he might justly have exacted it from us in our own persons: so that even in this respect we are, as St. Paul says, "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ:" and freely too in respect of any necessity that lay upon God to forgive us in this or any other way. It was a free act of his goodness to save us, even by the satisfaction and sufferings of his own Son. 2dly. It was in effect freely too, notwithstanding the mighty price which was paid for our redemption. Because this price was not of our own procuring, but of God's providing: he found out this ransom for us. And will any man say, that a prince who prevails with his son to intercede for the pardon of a rebel, yea and to suffer some punishment or to pay a fine for the obtaining of it, does not, in effect and in all equitable and grateful construction, forgive him freely?

Obj. III. Thirdly, It is yet further objected, That this seems to be more unreasona-

ble than the sacrificing of beasts among the Jews, nay, than the sacrificing of men among the heathen, and even of their own sons and daughters: because this is the offering up of the Son of God, the most innocent and the most excellent person that ever was.

To which I answer, that if we consider the manner, and the design of it, the thing will appear to be quite otherwise.

As to the manner of it, God did not command his Son to be sacrificed, but his providence permitted the wickedness and violence of men to put him to death. And then his goodness and wisdom did overrule this worst of actions to the best of ends. And if we consider the matter aright, how is this any more a reflection upon the holy providence of God, than any enormities and cruelties which by his permission are daily committed in the world?

And then if we consider the end and design of this permission of Christ's death, and the application of it to the purpose of a general expiation, we cannot but acknowledge, and even adore, the gracious and merciful design of it. For by this means God did at once put an end to that unreasonable and bloody way of worship which had been so long practised in the world: and after this one sacrifice, which was so infinitely dear to God, the benefit of expiation was not to be expected in any other way: all other sacrifices being worthless and vain in comparison of this: and it hath ever since obtained this effect, of making all other sacrifices to cease, in all parts of the world where Christianity hath prevailed.

Obj. IV. Fourthly, the last objection is, The injustice and cruelty of an innocent person suffering instead of the offender.

To this I answer, That they who make so great a noise with this objection do seem to me to give a full and clear answer to it themselves, by acknowledging, as they constantly and expressly do, that our Saviour suffered all this for our benefit and advantage, though not in our place and stead. For this, to my apprehension, is plainly to give up the cause, unless they can shew a good reason why there is not as much injustice and cruelty in an innocent person's suffering for the benefit and advantage of a malefactor, as in his suffering in his stead: so little do men in the heat of dispute and opposition, who are resolved to hold fast an opinion in despite of reason and good sense, consider, that they do many times, in effect, and by necessary consequence, grant the very thing which in express terms they do so stiffly and pertinaciously deny.

The truth of the matter is this: there is nothing of injustice and cruelty in either case; neither in an innocent person's suffering for the benefit of an offender, nor in his stead; supposing the suffering to be voluntary: but they have equally the same appearance of injustice and cruelty: nor can I possibly discern any reason, why injustice and cruelty should be objected in the one case more than in the other, there being every whit as little reason, why an innocent person should suffer for the benefit of a criminal, as why he should suffer in his stead. So that I hope this objection, which above all the rest hath been so loudly and so invidiously urged, hath received a just answer.

And I believe, if the matter were searched to the bottom, all this perverse contention, about our Saviour's suffering for our benefit but not in our stead, will signify just nothing. For if Christ died for our

benefit, so as, some way or other, by virtue of his death and sufferings, to save us from the wrath of God, and to procure our escape from eternal death; this, for aught I know, is all that any body means by his dying in our stead. For he that dies with an intention to do that benefit to another as to save him from death, doth certainly, to all intents and purposes, die in his place and stead.

And if they will grant this to be their meaning, the controversy is at an end; and both sides are agreed in the thing, and do only differ in the phrase and manner of expression; which is to seek a quarrel and an occasion of difference where there is no real ground for it: a thing which ought to be very far from reasonable and peaceable minds.

For the Socinians say, that our Saviour's voluntary obedience and sufferings did procure his exaltation at the right hand of God, and power and authority to forgive sins, and to give eternal life to as many as he pleased: so that they grant that his obedience and sufferings in the meritorious consequence of them, do redound to our benefit and advantage as much as we pretend and say they do; only they are loath in express terms to acknowledge that Christ died in our stead: and this for no other reason that I can imagine, but because they have denied it so often and so long.

But I appeal to the ingenuity of our adversaries, whether this do not in the last issue come all to one; and be not, on their part, a mere controversy about words: for suppose a malefactor condemned to some grievous punishment, and the king's son, to save him from it, is contented to submit to great disgrace and sufferings: in reward of which sufferings, the king takes his son into his throne, and sets him

at his own right hand, and gives him power to pardon this malefactor, and, upon a fitting submission and repentance, to advance him to honour: will not any man in this case allow, that the king's son suffered instead of this malefactor, and smile at any man that shall be so nice as to grant that indeed he suffered for him, but yet to deny that he was punished for him; to allow that he bore the inconvenience of his faults, but yet obstinately to stand it out that the faults of this malefactor were not laid upon him, or in any wise so imputed to him that he can be said to have suffered in his stead? This is just the case, and the difference in reality and in the last result of things is nothing but words.

Thus far have I tried your patience in a contentious argument; in which I take no pleasure, but yet shall be glad if I may be so happy as, by any thing that hath been said, to contribute towards the putting an end to so unhappy a controversy; which hath troubled the world so long, and raised such a dust, that very few have been able to see clearly through it.

However, I cannot dismiss this argument without making some useful but very short reflections upon this great doctrine of our religion; namely, that the Son of God, being made a sacrifice for us, and exposed to such bitter sufferings and so cruel a death for the expiation of our sins, should create in us the greatest dread and detestation of sin, and for ever deter us from all wilful transgression and disobedience. For if the guilt of our sins was done away upon such hard terms, and cost the dearly-beloved Son of God so much sweat and blood, then surely we ought to take great heed how, by our renewed provocations, we renew his passion, and do what in

us lies to "crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh, and to put him to an open shame."

If God did so terribly afflict the dearly beloved of his soul for our sakes; if the Son of God was so grievously wounded for our transgressions, and so sorely bruised for our iniquities; if so fearful a storm of vengeance fell upon the most innocent person that ever was for our sins, then we have reason to take that kind and merciful admonition of the Son of God to sinners, to "sin so more," lest a worse thing, if it be possible, come upon ourselves.

In this dispensation of God's grace and mercy to mankind, by the death of his Son, God seems to have gone to the very extremity of things, and almost further than goodness and justice will well admit—to afflict innocency itself to save the guilty: and if herein God hath expressed his hatred of sin in such a wonderful way of love and kindness to the sons of men as looks almost like hatred of innocency and his own Son; this ought in all ingenuity, and gratitude to our gracious Redeemer, who "was made a curse for us," and loved us to that degree as to "wash us from our sins in his own blood;" I say, this ought to beget in us a greater displeasure against sin, and a more perfect detestation of it, than if we had suffered the punishment due to it, in our own persons: for in this case, we could only have been displeased at ourselves and our sins as the just cause of our sufferings; but in the other, we ought to hate sin as the unhappy occasion of the saddest misfortune and sorest calamities to the best man that ever was, and to our best friend, for our sins and for our sakes.

Since then the Son of God hath so graciously condescended to be made in all things like unto us, "sin

only excepted;" let us aspire, as much as is possible, to become like to him: above all, let us hate and avoid sin as the only thing in which the Son of God would have no part with us, though he was contented to suffer such bitter things to save us from the defilement and dominion of it, from the punishment and all the dismal consequences of it.

"He had no sin," but God was pleased to "lay upon him the iniquities of us all," and "to make his soul an offering for sin," and to permit all that to be done to him which was due to us: he was contented to be sacrificed once for all mankind, that men might for ever cease from that inhuman and ineffectual way of sacrificing one another; whereby, instead of expiating their guilt, they did inflame it, and, by thinking to make atonement for their sins, they did in truth add to their number and heinousness of them.

And let us likewise learn from this admirable pattern, to pity those that are in misery, as Christ also hath pitied us; and to "save them that are ready to perish," for his sake "who came to seek and to save us that were lost."

Let us, upon all occasions, be ready to open our bowels of compassion towards the poor; in a thankful imitation of his grace and goodness, who, for our sakes, chose to be a beggar; that we for his sake might not despise the poor, but might have a tender regard and compassion to those whose condition in this world does so nearly resemble that in which the Son of God thought it fittest for him to appear when he was pleased to become man.

In a word, let us, in the whole course, and in all the actions of our lives, "shew forth the virtues of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light;" and "hath raised up a mighty salvation

for us," that, being delivered from all our spiritual enemies, from sin and all the powers of darkness, we might serve him who hath saved us; "walking in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives."

Now, "to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain: to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first-begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth: unto Him, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;" and whilst we were enemies to him, loved us at such a rate as never any man did his friend: to Him, who became man, that he might bring us to God; and assumed our frail and mortal nature, that he might clothe us with immortality and life: to Him, who was pleased to dwell and live amongst us, that he might teach us how to live: to "Him who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and lives for ever to make intercession for us:" to Him, be glory and dominion, thanksgiving and praise to eternal ages. Amen.

SERMON XLVIII.

CONCERNING THE UNITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE, AND THE BLESSED TRINITY, &c.

For there is one God.—1 Tim. ii. 5.

The particle *for* leads us to the consideration of the context and occasion of these words, which in short is this. The design of this Epistle is to direct Timothy, to whom St. Paul had committed the government of the church of Ephesus, how he ought to demean himself in that great and weighty charge. And at the beginning of this chapter he gives direction concerning public prayers in the church; that prayers and thanksgiving be made for all men, and for all ranks and orders of men; especially for kings and all that are in authority, that under them Christians might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

And this he tells us was very suitable to the Christian religion, by which God designed the salvation of mankind; and therefore it must needs be very acceptable to him, that we should offer up prayers and thanksgivings to him in behalf of all men: "For this (saith the apostle) is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

And then it follows in the next words, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all:" as if he had said—This universal charity

of Christians, in praying for all men, must needs be very acceptable to him to whom we put up our prayers, God the Father, who sent his Son for the salvation of all men: and to him likewise by whom we offer up our prayers to God, and is amongst us Christians the only mediator between God and man, in virtue of that price and ransom which he paid for the redemption of all mankind; I say, for this reason it must needs be very acceptable to him, that we should pray for all men, because he died for all men, and now that he is in heaven at the right hand of God intercedes with him for the salvation of those for whom he died: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all."

Which words, though they be brought in to prove more immediately, that it is acceptable to God our Saviour, that we should put up our prayers to him for all men, because he desires the salvation of all men, and hath sent his Son to purchase the salvation of all men, by the sacrifice of himself; and in virtue of that sacrifice to be the only mediator between God and us: I say, though this be the immediate scope and design of these words, yet they are likewise a direction to us, unto whom we ought to address our prayers—namely, to God; and by whose mediation and intercession we ought to put up our prayers to God the Father, namely, by his Son Jesus Christ, who is constituted the only mediator between God and men.

There are several propositions contained in this and the following verse; but I shall at present confine myself to the first; namely, that "there is one God;" that is, "but one," as St. Paul elsewhere expresseth it—"there is none

1 Cor. viii. 4.

other God but one." And Moses lays this as the foundation of the natural law, as well as of the Jewish religion—"the Lord he is one God, and there is none besides him;" Deut. iv. 35. that is, besides Jehovah, whom the people of Israel did worship as the only true God. And this the prophet Isaiah perpetually declares in opposition to the polytheism and variety of gods among the heathen. "I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no God." Isa. xliv. 6. Ver. 8. And again, "Is there any god besides me? there is no god, I know not any:" he who hath an infinite knowledge and knows all things, knows no other god. And our blessed Saviour makes this the fundamental article of all religion, and the knowledge of it necessary to every man's salvation: "This (says he) is life eternal, to know thee the only true God."

The unity of the Divine nature is a notion wherein the greatest and the wisest part of mankind did always agree, and therefore may reasonably be presumed to be either natural, or to have sprung from some original tradition delivered down to us from the first parents of mankind—I mean, that there is one Supreme Being, the author and cause of all things, whom the most ancient of the heathen poets commonly called "the Father of Gods and Men." And thus Aristotle in his Metaphysics defines God, The eternal and most excellent, or best of all living beings. And this notion of one Supreme Being, agrees very well with that exact harmony which appears in the frame and government of the world, in which we see all things conspiring to one end, and continuing in one uniform order and course; which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other

but a constant and uniform cause; and which to a considering man does plainly shew, that all things are made and governed by that one powerful principle, and great and wise mind, which we call God.

But although the generality of mankind had a notion of one supreme God, yet the idolatry of the heathen plainly shews, that this notion, in process of time, was greatly degenerated, and corrupted into an apprehension of a plurality of gods; though in reason it is evident enough, that there can be no more gods than one; and that one, who is of infinite perfection, is as sufficient to all purposes whatsoever, as ten thousand deities, if they were possible, could possibly be; as I shall shew in the following discourse.

Now this multitude of deities, which the fond superstition and vain imagination of men had formed to themselves, were, by the wiser sort, who being forced to comply with the follies of the people endeavoured to make the best of them, supposed to be either parts of the universe, which the Egyptians, as Plutarch tells us, thought to be the same with God; but then the more considerable parts of the universe they parcelled out into several deities; and as the ocean hath several names, according to the several coasts and countries by which it passeth, so they gave several names to this one deity, according to the several parts of the world which several nations made the objects of their worship.

Or else, they adored the several perfections and powers of the one supreme God under several names and titles, with regard to the various blessings and benefits which they thought they received from him.

Thus the Indian philosophers, the Brachmans, are said to have worshipped the sun as the supreme

Deity; and he certainly is the most worshipful of all sensible beings, and bids fairest for a deity; especially if he was, as they supposed, animated by a spirit endued with knowledge and understanding. And if a man who had been bred in a dark cave, should all on the sudden be brought out at noonday to behold this visible world; after he had viewed and considered it a while, he would in all probability pitch upon the sun as the most likely, of all the things he had seen, to be a deity. For if such a man had any notion of a God, and were to choose one upon sight, he would without dispute fix upon the sun, and fall down before him and worship him.

And Macrobius manageth this as his main plea for the idolatry of the heathen, That under all the several names of their gods they worshipped the sun: and this diversity of names was but a more distinct conception and acknowledgment of the many blessings and advantages which mankind received from him, and a more particular and express adoration of the several powers and perfections which were in him. And this was the very best defence, and all the tolerable sense which the wisest among the heathen could make, of the multitude of their deities.

And yet whilst they generally owned one Supreme Being that was the principle and original of all things, they worshipped several subordinate deities as really distinct from one another. Some of these they fancied to be superior to the rest, and to have their residence in heaven; by which Marcilius Ficinus supposes Plato to mean no more but the chief of the angels. These were called θεοὶ, *Dei Superi* and *Dii Cœlestes, superior* and *heavenly gods:*

the Scripture terms them the "host of heaven," meaning the sun, moon, and stars, which they supposed to be animated, or at least to be inhabited by angels, or glorious spirits, whom they called gods.

Other of their deities were accounted much inferior to these, being supposed to be the souls of their deceased heroes; who, for their great and worthy deeds, when they lived upon earth, were supposed after death to be translated into the number of their gods. And these were called *Semidei* and *Deastri*, that is, *half-gods*, and *a sort of gods*. And as the other were *celestial*, so these were Δαίμονες ἐπιχθόνιοι, a kind of *terrestrial* spirits, that were presidents and procurators of human affairs here below; that is, a middle sort of divine powers that were mediators and agents between God and men, and did carry the prayers and supplications of men to God, and bring down the commands and blessings of God to men.

But in the midst of all this crowd and confusion of deities, and the various superstitions about them, the wiser heathen, as Thales, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Tully, Plutarch, and others, preserved a true notion of one supreme God, whom they defined an Infinite Spirit, pure from all matter, and free from all imperfection: and all the variety of their worship was, as they pretended in excuse of it, but a more particular owning of the various representations of the Divine power and excellences which manifested themselves in the world, and of the several communications of blessings and favours by them imparted to men: and Tertullian observes, that even when idolatry had very much obscured the glory of the sovereign Deity, yet the greater part of

Adversus Marcionem, *l.* 1. *c.* 10.

mankind did still, in their common forms of speech, appropriate the name of God, in a more especial and peculiar manner to one, saying, "If God grant—If God please," and the like.

So that there is sufficient ground to believe, that the unity of the Divine nature, or the notion of one supreme God, Creator and Governor of the world, was the primitive and general belief of mankind: and that polytheism and idolatry were a corruption and degeneracy from the original notion which mankind had concerning God; as the Scripture history doth declare and testify.

And this account which I have given of the heathen idolatry doth by no means excuse it. For whatever may be said by way of extenuation in behalf of some few of the wiser and more devout among them, the generality were grossly guilty both, of believing more gods, and of worshipping false gods.

And this must needs be a very great crime, since the Scripture every where declares God to be particularly jealous in this case, and that "he will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images:" nay, we may not so much as make use of sensible images to put us in mind of God, lest devout ignorance, seeing the worship which wise men paid towards an idol, should be drawn to terminate their worship there, as being the very Deity itself; which was certainly the case of the greatest part of the heathen world.

And surely those Christians are in no less danger of idolatry, who pay a veneration to images by kneeling down and praying before them; and in this they are much more inexcusable, because they offend against a much clearer light; and yet when they go about to justify this practice, are able to bring no

other nor better pleas for themselves than the heathen did for their worshipping of images, and for praying to their inferior deities, whom they looked upon as mediators between the gods in heaven and men upon earth.

There is but one objection, that I know of, against the general consent of mankind concerning the unity of God; and it is this—that there was an ancient doctrine of some of the most ancient nations, that there were two first causes or principles of all things; the one the cause of all good, and the other of all the evil that is in the world: the reason whereof seems to have been, that they could not apprehend how things of so contrary nature, as good and evil, could proceed from one and the same cause.

And these two principles in several nations were called by several names. Plutarch says, that among the Greeks the good principle was called God, and the evil principle Δαίμων, or the devil. In conformity to which ancient tradition the Manichees, a sect which called themselves Christians, did advance two principles, the one infinitely good, which they supposed to be the original cause of all the good which is in the world; the other infinitely evil, to which they ascribed all the evils that are in the world.

But all this is very plainly a corruption of a much more ancient tradition concerning that old serpent, the devil, the head of the fallen angels, who, by tempting our first parents to transgress a positive and express law of God, brought sin first into the world and all the evils consequent upon it; of which the Scripture gives us a most express and particular account.

And as to the notion of a being infinitely evil, into

which this tradition was corrupted, after idolatry had prevailed in the world, besides that it is a contradiction, it would likewise be to no purpose to assert two opposite principles of infinite, that is, of equal force and power, for two infinites must of necessity be equal to one another; because nothing can be more or greater than infinite: and therefore, if two infinite beings were possible, they would certainly be equal, and could not be otherwise.

Now that the notion of a principle infinitely evil is a contradiction, will be very plain, if we consider that what is infinitely evil must, in strict reasoning, and by necessary consequence, be infinitely imperfect; and therefore infinitely weak, and for that reason, though never so malicious and mischievous, yet being infinitely weak and foolish, could never be in capacity either to contrive mischief or to execute it.

But if it should be admitted, that a being infinitely mischievous could be infinitely knowing and powerful, yet it could effect no evil: because the opposite principle of infinite goodness, being also infinitely wise and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands. So that upon this supposition the notion of a Deity must signify just nothing, because, by virtue of the eternal opposition and equal conflict of these two principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual bay; and being just an equal match to one another, the one having as much mind and power to do good, as the other to do evil, instead of being two deities they would be but two idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

And having, I hope, now sufficiently cleared this objection, I shall proceed to shew how agreeable this principle, that there is but one God, is to the common reason of mankind, and to the clearest and

most essential notions which we have of God: and this will appear these two ways.

First, By considering the most essential perfections of the Divine nature.

Secondly, From the repugnancy and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconvenience, of supposing more gods than one.

First, By considering the most essential perfections of the Divine nature. Absolute perfection, which we ascribe to God, as the most essential notion which mankind hath always had concerning him, does necessarily suppose unity; because this is essential to the notion of a being that is absolutely perfect, that all perfection meets and is united in such a being: but to imagine more gods, and some perfections to be in one and some in another, does destroy the most essential notion which men have of God, namely, that he is a being absolutely perfect, that is, as perfect as is possible: now to suppose some perfections in one god which are not in another, is to suppose some possible perfection to be wanting in God, which is a contradiction to the most natural and the most easy notion which all men have of God, that he is a being in whom all perfections do meet and are united: but if we suppose more gods, each of which hath all perfections united in him, then all but one would be superfluous and needless; and therefore by just and necessary consequence not only may, but of necessity must be, supposed not to be; since necessary existence is essential to the Deity: and therefore if but one God be necessary, there can be no more.

Secondly, From the repugnancy and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconveniency, of the contrary. For suppose there were more gods, two for

example: and if there may be two there may be a million, for we can stop no where: I say, suppose two gods; either these two would be in all perfections equal and alike, or unequal and unlike: if equal and alike in all things, then, as I said before, one of them would be needless and superfluous, and if one, why not as well the other? they being supposed to be in all things perfectly alike; and then there would be no necessity at all of the being of a god; and yet it is granted on all hands, that necessary existence is essential to the notion of a god: but if they be unequal, that is, one of them inferior to and less perfect than the other, that which is inferior and less perfect could not be God, because he would not have all perfection. So that which way soever we turn the thing and look upon it, the notion of more gods than one is by its own repugnancy and self-contradiction destructive of itself.

Before I come to apply this doctrine of the unity of God, I must not pass by a very considerable difficulty, which will most certainly arise in every man's mind, without taking particular notice of it, and endeavouring to remove it, if I can. And it is the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, or of three real differences or distinct persons in one and the same Divine nature.

And though this be not a difficulty peculiar only to the Christian religion, as by the generality of those who urge this objection against Christians hath been inconsiderately thought; for it is certain that long before Christianity appeared in the world, there was a very ancient tradition, both among Jews and heathen, concerning three real differences or distinctions in the Divine nature, very nearly resembling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, as I shall

have occasion more fully to shew by and by; yet it cannot be denied, but that this difficulty doth in a more especial manner affect the Christian religion; the generality of Christians, who do most firmly believe the Trinity, believing likewise at the same time, more steadfastly if it be possible, that "there is but one God." "To us (saith St. Paul, that is, to us Christians,) there is but one God." But how can this possibly consist with the common doctrine of Christians concerning the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to each of whom they attribute, as they verily believe the Scripture does, the most incommunicable properties and perfections of the Divine nature? and what is this less in effect than to say, that there are three Gods?

1 Cor. viii. 6.

For the clearing of this difficulty I shall, with all the brevity I can, offer these following considerations: which I hope, to an impartial and unprejudiced judgment, will be sufficient to remove it, or at least to break the main force and strength of it.

I. I desire it may be well considered, that there is a wide difference between the nice speculations of the schools, beyond what is revealed in Scripture, concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, and what the Scripture only teaches and asserts concerning this mystery. For it is not to be denied, but that the schoolmen, who abounded in wit and leisure, though very few among them had either exact skill in the Holy Scriptures, or in ecclesiastical antiquity and the writings of the ancient fathers of the Christian church: I say, it cannot be denied, but that these speculative and very acute men, who wrought a great part of their divinity out of their own brain, as spiders do cobwebs out of their own bowels, have

started a thousand subtilties about this mystery, such as no Christian is bound to trouble his head withal; much less is it necessary for him to understand those niceties, which we may reasonably presume that they who talk of them did themselves never thoroughly understand; and least of all is it necessary to believe them. The modesty of Christians is contented in Divine mysteries to know what God hath thought fit to reveal concerning them, and hath no curiosity to be wise above that which is written. It is enough to believe what God says concerning these matters; and if any man will venture to say more, every other man surely is at his liberty to believe as he sees reason.

II. I desire it may, in the next place, be considered, that the doctrine of the Trinity, even as it is asserted in Scripture, is acknowledged by us to be still a great mystery, and so imperfectly revealed as to be in a great measure incomprehensible by human reason. And therefore, though some learned and judicious men may have very commendably attempted a more particular explication of this great mystery by the strength of reason, yet I dare not pretend to that, knowing both the difficulty and danger of such an attempt, and mine own insufficiency for it.

All that I ever designed upon this argument was to make out the credibility of the thing from the authority of the Holy Scripture, without descending to a more particular explication of it than the Scripture hath given us; lest, by endeavouring to lay the difficulties, which are already started about it, new ones should be raised, and such as may perhaps be much harder to be removed than those which we have now to grapple withal. And this I hope I have in some

measure done in one of the former discourses. Nor indeed do I see that it is any ways necessary to do more; it being sufficient that God hath declared what he thought fit in this matter, and that we do firmly believe what he says concerning it to be true, though we do not perfectly comprehend the meaning of all that he hath said about it.

For in this and the like cases I take an implicit faith to be very commendable; that is, to believe whatever we are sufficiently assured God hath revealed, though we do not fully understand his meaning in such a revelation. And thus every man who believes the Holy Scriptures to be a truly Divine revelation, does implicitly believe a great part of the prophetical books of Scripture, and several obscure expressions in those books, though he do not particularly understand the meaning of all the predictions and expressions contained in them. In like manner, there are certainly a great many very good Christians who do not believe and comprehend the mysteries of faith nicely enough to approve themselves to a scholastical and magisterial judge of controversies, who yet, if they do heartily embrace the doctrines which are clearly revealed in Scripture, and live up to the plain precepts of the Christian religion, will I doubt not be very well approved by the great and just, and by the infallibly infallible Judge of the world.

III. Let it be further considered, that though neither the word trinity, nor perhaps person, in the sense in which it is used by divines when they treat of this mystery, be any where to be met with in Scripture; yet it cannot be denied but that Three are there spoken of by the names of Father, Son,

and Holy Ghost, in whose name every Christian is baptized, and to each of whom the highest titles and properties of God are in Scripture attributed: and these Three are spoken of with as much distinction from one another as we use to speak of three several persons.

So that though the word trinity be not found in Scripture, yet these Three are there expressly and frequently mentioned; and a trinity is nothing but three of any thing. And so likewise, though the word person be not there expressly applied to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; yet it will be very hard to find a more convenient word whereby to express the distinction of these Three. For which reason I could never yet see any just cause to quarrel at this term. For since the Holy Spirit of God in Scripture hath thought fit in speaking of these Three to distinguish them from one another, as we use in common speech to distinguish three several persons, I cannot see any reason why, in the explication of this mystery, which purely depends upon Divine revelation, we should not speak of it in the same manner as the Scripture doth: and though the word person is now become a term of art, I see no cause why we should decline it, so long as we mean by it neither more or less than what the Scripture says in other words.

IV. It deserves further to be considered, that there hath been a very ancient tradition concerning three real differences or distinctions in the Divine nature; and these, as I said before, very nearly resemble the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Whence this tradition had its original is not easy upon good and certain grounds to say; but certain it is, that the Jews anciently had this notion: and

that they did distinguish the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit of God, from him who was absolutely called God, and whom they looked upon as the first principle of all things; as is plain from Philo Judæus, and Moses Nachmanides, and others cited by the learned Grotius in his incomparable book of the Truth of the Christian Religion. Lib. V.

And among the heathen, Plato, who probably enough might have this notion from the Jews, did make three distinctions in the Deity by the names of essential goodness, and mind, and spirit.

So that whatever objections this matter may be liable to, it is not so peculiar a doctrine of the Christian religion as many have imagined, though it is revealed by it with much more clearness and certainty: and consequently, neither the Jews nor Plato have any reason to object it to us Christians; especially since they pretend no other ground for it but either their own reason, or an ancient tradition from their fathers: whereas we Christians do appeal to express Divine revelation for what we believe in this matter, and do believe it singly upon that account.

V. It is besides very considerable, that the Scriptures do deliver this doctrine of the Trinity without any manner of doubt or question concerning the unity of the Divine nature: and not only so, but do most steadfastly and constantly assert that there is but one God: and in those very texts, in which these three differences are mentioned, the unity of the Divine nature is expressly asserted; as where St. John makes mention of the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the unity of these Three is likewise affirmed—" there are Three that bear record in

heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit; and these Three are one."

VI. It is yet further considerable, that from this mystery, as delivered in Scripture, a plurality of Gods cannot be inferred without making the Scripture grossly to contradict itself: which I charitably suppose the Socinians would be as loath to admit as we ourselves are. And if either councils, or fathers, or schoolmen, have so explained this mystery as to give any just ground, or so much as a plausible colour, for such an inference, let the blame fall where it is due, and let it not be charged on the Holy Scriptures; but rather, as the apostle says in another case, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

VII. Lastly, I desire it may be considered, that it is not repugnant to reason to believe some things which are incomprehensible by our reason; provided that we have sufficient ground and reason for the belief of them: especially if they be concerning God, who is in his nature incomprehensible; and we be well assured that he hath revealed them. And therefore it ought not to offend us that these differences in the Deity are incomprehensible by our finite understandings; because the Divine nature itself is so, and yet the belief of that is the foundation of all religion.

There are a great many things in nature which we cannot comprehend how they either are, or can be: as the continuity of matter, that is, how the parts of it do hang so fast together, that are many times very hard to be parted: and yet we are sure that it is so, because we see it every day. So likewise how the small seeds of things contain the whole form and nature of the things from which they pro-

ceed and into which by degrees they grow; and yet we plainly see this every year.

There are many things likewise in ourselves, which no man is able in any measure to comprehend, as to the manner how they are done and performed —as the vital union of the soul and body: who can imagine by what device or means a spirit comes to be so closely united and so firmly linked to a material body, that they are not to be parted without great force and violence offered to nature? The like may be said of the operations of our several faculties of sense and imagination, of memory and reason, and especially of the liberty of our wills: and yet we certainly find all these faculties in ourselves, though we cannot either comprehend or explain the particular manner in which the several operations of them are performed.

And if we cannot comprehend the manner of those operations which we plainly perceive and feel to be in ourselves, much less can we expect to comprehend things without us; and least of all can we pretend to comprehend the infinite nature and perfections of God, and every thing belonging to him. For God himself is certainly the greatest mystery of all other, and acknowledged by mankind to be in his nature, and in the particular manner of his existence, incomprehensible by human understanding. And the reason of this is very evident, because God is infinite, and our knowledge and understanding is but finite: and yet no sober man ever thought this a good reason to call the being of God in question.

The same may be said of God's certain knowledge of future contingencies which depend upon the uncertain wills of free agents: it being utterly inconceivable how any understanding, how large and per-

fect soever, can certainly know beforehand that which depends upon the free-will of another, which is an arbitrary and uncertain cause.

And yet the Scripture doth not only attribute this foreknowledge to God, but gives us also plain instances of God's foretelling such things, many ages before they happened, as could not come to pass but by the sins of men, in which we are sure that God can have no hand; though nothing can happen without his permission: such was that most memorable event of the death of Christ, who, as the Scripture tells us, "was by wicked hands crucified and slain;" and yet even this is said to have happened according to the determinate foreknowledge of God, and was punctually foretold by him some hundreds of years before. Nay, the Scripture doth not only ascribe this power and perfection to the Divine knowledge, but natural reason hath been forced to acknowledge it, as we may see in some of the wisest of the philosophers. And yet it would puzzle the greatest philosopher that ever was, to give any tolerable account how any knowledge whatsoever can certainly and infallibly foresee an event through uncertain and contingent causes. All the reasonable satisfaction that can be had in this matter is this—that it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that infinite knowledge may have ways of knowing things which our finite understandings can by no means comprehend how they can possibly be known.

Again, there is hardly any thing more inconceivable than how a thing should be of itself, and without any cause of its being; and yet our reason compels us to acknowledge this; because we certainly see that something is, which must either have been

of itself, and without a cause, or else something that we do not see must have been of itself, and have made all other things: and by this reasoning we are forced to acknowledge a Deity, the mind of man being able to find no rest but in the acknowledgment of one eternal and wise Mind as the principle and first cause of all other things; and this principle is that which mankind do by general consent call God. So that God hath laid a sure foundation of our acknowledgment of his being in the reason of our own minds. And though it be one of the hardest things in the world to conceive how any thing can be of itself, yet necessity drives us to acknowledge it, whether we will or no: and this being once granted, our reason, being tired in trying all other ways, will for its own quiet and ease force us at last to fall in with the general apprehension and belief of mankind concerning a Deity.

To give but one instance more: There is the like difficulty in conceiving how any thing can be made out of nothing; and yet our reason doth oblige us to believe it: because matter, which is a very imperfect being and merely passive, must either always have been of itself; or else, by the infinite power of a most perfect and active being, must have been made out of nothing: which is much more credible, than that any thing so imperfect as matter is should be of itself: because that which is of itself cannot be conceived to have any bounds and limits of its being and perfection; for by the same reason that it necessarily is and of itself it must necessarily have all perfection, which it is certain matter hath not; and yet necessary existence is so great a perfection, that we cannot reasonably suppose any thing that hath this perfection to want any other.

Thus you see, by these instances, that it is not repugnant to reason to believe a great many things to be, of the manner of whose existence we are not able to give a particular and distinct account. And much less is it repugnant to reason to believe those things concerning God which we are very well assured he hath declared concerning himself, though these things by our reason should be incomprehensible.

And this is truly the case as to the matter now under debate: we are sufficiently assured that the Scriptures are a Divine revelation, and that this mystery of the Trinity is therein declared to us. Now that we cannot comprehend it, is no sufficient reason not to believe it: for if this were a good reason for not believing it, then no man ought to believe that there is a God, because his nature is most certainly incomprehensible. But we are assured by many arguments that there is a God; and the same natural reason which assures us that he is, doth likewise assure us that he is incomprehensible; and therefore our believing him to be so, doth by no means overthrow our belief of his being.

In like manner, we are assured by Divine revelation of the truth of this doctrine of the Trinity; and being once assured of that, our not being able fully to comprehend it, is not reason enough to stagger our belief of it. A man cannot deny what he sees, though the necessary consequence of admitting it may be something which he cannot comprehend. One cannot deny the frame of this world which he sees with his eyes, though from thence it will necessarily follow, that either that, or something else, must be of itself; which yet, as I said before, is a thing which no man can comprehend how it can be.

And by the same reason, a man must not deny what God says to be true; though he cannot comprehend many things which God says: as particularly concerning this mystery of the Trinity. It ought then to satisfy us, that there is sufficient evidence that this doctrine is delivered in Scripture, and that what is there declared concerning it doth not imply a contradiction. For why should our finite understandings pretend to comprehend that which is infinite, or to know all the real differences that are consistent with the unity of an infinite Being; or to be able fully to explain this mystery by any similitude or resemblance taken from finite beings?

But before I leave this argument, I cannot but take notice of one thing which they of the church of Rome are perpetually objecting to us upon this occasion. And it is this—that by the same reason that we believe the doctrine of the Trinity, we may, and must receive that of transubstantiation. God forbid: because of all the doctrines that ever were in any religion, this of transubstantiation is certainly the most abominably absurd.

However, this objection plainly shews how fondly and obstinately they are addicted to their own errors, how misshapen and monstrous soever; insomuch, that rather than the dictates of their church, how absurd soever, should be called in question, they will question the truth even of Christianity itself; and if we will not take in transubstantiation, and admit it to be a necessary article of the Christian faith, they grow so sullen and desperate, that they matter not what becomes of all the rest: and rather than not have their will of us in that which is controverted, they will give up that which by their

own confession is an undoubted article of the Christian faith, and not controverted on either side; except only by the Socinians, who yet are hearty enemies to transubstantiation, and have exposed the absurdity of it with great advantage.

But I shall endeavour to return a more particular answer to this objection, and such an one as I hope will satisfy every considerate and unprejudiced mind, that after all this confidence and swaggering of their's, there is by no means equal reason either for the receiving or for the rejecting of these two doctrines of the Trinity and transubstantiation.

First, There is not equal reason for the belief of these two doctrines. This objection, if it be of any force, must suppose that there is equal evidence and proof from Scripture for these two doctrines: but this we utterly deny, and with great reason; because it is no more evident from the words of Scripture that the sacramental bread is substantially changed into Christ's natural body by virtue of those words, "This is my body," than it is, that Christ is substantially changed into a natural vine by virtue of those words, "I am the true vine;" or than John xv. 1. that the rock in the wilderness, of which the Israelites drank, was substantially changed into the person of Christ, because it is expressly said, "That rock was Christ;" or than that the Christian church is substantially changed into the natural body of Christ, because it is in express terms said of the church, that it "is his body." Eph. i. 23.

But besides this, several of their own most learned writers have freely acknowledged that transubstantiation can neither be directly proved, nor necessarily concluded, from Scripture: but this the writers of the Christian church did never acknow-

ledge concerning the Trinity, and the Divinity of Christ; but have always appealed to the clear and undeniable testimonies of Scripture for the proof of these doctrines. And then the whole force of the objection amounts to this—That if I am bound to believe what I am sure God says, though I cannot comprehend it, then I am bound by the same reason to believe the greatest absurdity in the world, though I have no manner of assurance of any Divine revelation concerning it. And if this be their meaning, though we understand not transubstantiation, yet we very well understand what they would have, but cannot grant it; because there is not equal reason to believe two things, for one of which there is good proof, and for the other no proof at all.

Secondly, Neither is there equal reason for the rejecting of these two doctrines. This the objection supposes, which yet cannot be supposed but upon one or both of these two grounds: either because these two doctrines are equally incomprehensible, or because they are equally loaded with absurdities and contradictions.

The first is no good ground of rejecting any doctrine, merely because it is incomprehensible; as I have abundantly shewed already. But besides this, there is a wide difference between plain matters of sense, and mysteries concerning God; and it does by no means follow, that if a man do once admit any thing concerning God which he cannot comprehend, he hath no reason afterwards to believe what he himself sees. This is a most unreasonable and destructive way of arguing, because it strikes at the foundation of all certainty, and sets every man at liberty to deny the most plain and

evident truths of Christianity, if he may not be humoured in having the absurdest things of the world admitted for true. The next step will be to persuade us, that we may as well deny the being of God because his nature is incomprehensible by our reason, as deny transubstantiation because it evidently contradicts our senses.

2dly. Nor are these two doctrines loaded with the like absurdities and contradictions: so far from this, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is delivered in the Scriptures, and hath already been explained, hath no absurdity or contradiction either involved in it, or necessarily consequent upon it: but the doctrine of transubstantiation is big with all imaginable absurdity and contradiction. And their own schoolmen have sufficiently exposed it; especially Scotus—and he designed to do so, as any man that attentively reads him may plainly discover: for in his disputation about it he treats this doctrine with the greatest contempt, as a new invention of the council of Lateran under Pope Innocent III. To the decree of which council concerning it he seems to pay a formal submission, but really derides it as contrary to the common sense and reason of mankind, and not at all supported by Scripture; as any one may easily discern that will carefully consider his manner of handling it, and the result of his whole disputation about it.

And now, suppose there were some appearance of absurdity and contradiction in the doctrine of the Trinity as it is delivered in Scripture, must we therefore believe a doctrine which is not at all revealed in Scripture, and which hath certainly in it all the absurdities in the world, and all the contradictions to sense and reason, and which, once admitted,

doth at once destroy all certainty? Yes, say they, why not? since we of the church of Rome are satisfied that this doctrine is revealed in Scripture; or, if it be not, is defined by the church, which is every whit as good. But is this equal, to demand of us the belief of a thing which hath always been controverted, not only between us and them, but even among themselves, at least till the council of Trent? And this upon such unreasonable terms, that we must either yield this point to them, or else renounce a doctrine agreed on both sides to be revealed in Scripture.

To shew the unreasonableness of this proceeding, let us suppose a priest of the church of Rome pressing a Jew or Turk to the belief of transubstantiation; and, because one kindness deserves another, the Jew or Turk should demand of him the belief of all the fables in the Talmud, or in the Alcoran; since none of these, nor indeed all of them together, are near so absurd as transubstantiation; would not this be much more reasonable and equal than what they demand of us? since no absurdity, how monstrous and big soever, can be thought of, which may not enter into an understanding in which a breach hath been already made wide enough to admit transubstantiation. The priests of Baal did not half so much deserve to be exposed by the prophet for their superstition and folly, as the priests of the church of Rome do for this senseless and stupid doctrine of their's with a hard name. I shall only add this one thing more—that if this doctrine were possible to be true, and clearly proved to be so, yet it would be evidently useless and to no purpose. For it pretends to change the substance of one thing into the substance of another thing that is already,

and before this change is pretended to be made. But to what purpose? Not to make the body of Christ, for that was already in being; and the substance of the bread is lost, nothing of it remaineth but accidents, which are good for nothing, and indeed are nothing when the substance is destroyed and gone.

All that now remains is to make some practical inferences from this doctrine of the unity of the Divine nature. And they shall be the same which God himself makes by Moses, which text is also cited by our Saviour—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." So that, according to our Saviour, the whole duty of man, the love of God and of our neighbour, is founded in the unity of the Divine nature. Deut. vi. 4; Mark xii. 29—31.

I. The love of God: "the Lord thy God is one Lord," therefore "thou shalt love him with all thy heart, &c. this is the first and great commandment:" and it comprehends in it all the duties of the first table as naturally flowing from it—as that we should serve him only, and pay no religious worship to any but to him. For to pay religious worship to any thing is to make it a god, and to acknowledge it for such: and therefore God being but one, we can give religious worship to none but to him only. And among all the parts of religious worship none is more peculiarly appropriated to the Deity than solemn invocation and prayer. For he to whom men address their requests, at all times,

and in all places, must be supposed to be always every where present, to understand all our desires and wants, and to be able to supply them; and this God only is, and can do.

So likewise from the unity of the Divine nature may be inferred, that we should not worship God by any sensible image or representation: because God, being a singular being, there is nothing like him, or that can, without injuring and debasing his most spiritual and perfect and immense being, be compared to him: as he himself speaks in the prophet, "To whom will ye liken me, saith the Lord, and make me equal?" And therefore with no distinction whatsoever can it be lawful to give religious worship, or any part of it, to any but God: we can pray to none but to him, because he only is every where present, and "only knows the hearts of all the children of men;" which Solomon gives as the reason why we should address our supplications to God only, "who dwelleth in the heavens."

Isaiah xlvi. 5.

1 Kings viii. 39.

So that the reason of these two precepts is founded in the unity and singularity of the Divine nature, and unless there be more gods than one, we must worship him only, and pray to none but him: because we can give invocation to none but to him only whom we believe to be God; as St. Paul reasons, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?"

Rom. x. 14.

II. The love likewise of our neighbour is founded in the unity of the Divine nature, and may be inferred from it: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord, therefore thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And the apostle gives this

reason why all mankind should be at unity among themselves; "There is one God and Father of all," and therefore we should "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" that is, live in mutual love and peace. The prophet likewise assigns this reason why all mankind should be upon good terms with one another, and not be injurious one to another. "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us? Why do we then deal treacherously every man against his brother?"

Eph. iv. 6.

Mal. ii. 10.

And therefore, when we see such hatred and enmity among men, such divisions and animosities among Christians, we may not only ask St. Paul's question, "Is Christ divided?" that we cannot agree about serving him; either all to serve him one way, or to bear with one another in our differences: I say, we may not only ask St. Paul's question, "Is Christ divided?" but may ask further, "Is God divided?" Is there not one God, and are we not all his offspring? Are we not all the sons of Adam, who was the son of God? So that if we trace ourselves to our original, we shall find a great nearness and equality among men; and this equality, that we are all God's creatures and image, and that the one only God is the Father of us all, is a more real ground of mutual love, and peace, and equity in our dealings one with another, than any of those petty differences and distinctions of strong and weak, of rich and poor, of wise and foolish, of base and honourable, can be to encourage men to any thing of insolence, injustice, and inequality of dealing one towards another. Because that wherein we all agree—that we are the creatures and children

of God, and have all one common Father—is essential and constant; but those things wherein we differ are accidental and mutable, and happen to one another by turns.

Thus much may suffice to have been spoken concerning the proposition in the text, "There is one God:" to Him, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

OF

RESOLUTION AND STEADFASTNESS

IN

RELIGION.

THE

PREFACE TO THE READER.

BEING, I hope, for the remainder of my life, released from that irksome and unpleasant work of controversy and wrangling about religion, I shall now turn my thoughts to something more agreeable to my temper, and of a more direct and immediate tendency to the promoting of true religion, to the happiness of human society, and the reformation of the world.

I have no intention to reflect upon any that stand up in defence of truth, and contend earnestly for it, endeavouring in the spirit of meekness to reclaim those that are in error. For I doubt not but a very good man may upon several occasions be almost unavoidably engaged in controversies of religion: and if he have a head clear and cool enough, so as to be master of his own notions and temper in that hot kind of service, he may therein do considerable advantage to the truth: though a man that hath once "drawn blood in controversy," as Mr. Mede expresseth it, is seldom known ever perfectly to recover his own good temper afterwards.

For this reason a good man should not be very willing, when his Lord comes, to be found so doing, and as it were beating his fellow-servants: and all controversy, as it is usually managed, is little better. A good man would be loath to be taken out of

the world reeking hot from a sharp contention with a perverse adversary; and not a little out of countenance, to find himself in this temper translated into the calm and peaceable regions of the blessed, where nothing but perfect charity and good-will reign for ever.

I know not whether St. Paul, who had been taken up into the third heavens, did by that question of his, "Where is the disputer of this world?" intend to insinuate, that this wrangling work hath place only in this world, and upon this earth, where only there is dust to be raised, but will have no place in the other. But whether St. Paul intended this or not, the thing itself I think is true, that in the other world all things will be clear and past dispute. To be sure, among the blessed, and probably also among the miserable; unless fierce and furious contentions, with great heat without light, about things of no moment and concernment to them, should be designed for a part of their torment.

As to the following sermons, I am sensible that the style of them is more loose and full of words, than is agreeable to just and exact discourses; but so I think the style of popular sermons ought to be. And therefore I have not been very careful to mend this matter; choosing rather that they should appear in that native simplicity in which, so many years ago, they were first framed, than dressed up with too much care and art. As they are, I hope, the candid and ingenuous readers will take them in good part.

And I do heartily wish, that all that are concerned in the respective duties, treated on in the following sermons, would be persuaded so to lay them to heart as to put them effectually in practice; that

how much soever the reformation of this corrupt and degenerate age in which we live is almost utterly to be despaired of, we may yet have a comfortable prospect of future times, by seeing the foundation of a better world begun to be laid in the careful and conscientious discharge of the duties here mentioned. That by this means "the generations to come may know God, and the children yet unborn may fear the Lord."

I have great reason to be sensible how fast the infirmities of age are coming upon me, and therefore must work the works of Him, whose providence hath placed me in the station wherein I am, "whilst it is day, because the night cometh when no man can work."

I knew very well, before I entered upon this great and weighty charge, my own manifold defects, and how unequal my best abilities were for the due discharge of it; but I did not feel this so sensibly as I now do every day more and more. And therefore, that I might make some small amends for greater failings, I knew not how better to place the broken hours I had to spare from almost perpetual business of one kind or other, than in preparing something for the public that might be of use to recover the decayed piety and virtue of the present age; in which iniquity doth so much abound, and the love of God and religion is grown so cold.

To this end I have chosen to publish these plain sermons, and to recommend them to the serious perusal and faithful practice both of the pastors and people committed to my charge; earnestly beseeching Almighty God, that by his blessing they may prove effectual to that good end for which they are sincerely designed.

SERMON XLIX.

[Preached at St. Lawrence-Jewry, June 3, 1684.]

CONCERNING RESOLUTION AND STEADFASTNESS IN RELIGION.

———*But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*—JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

AFTER Joshua had brought the people of Israel into the promised land, and settled them in the quiet possession of it, his great desire was to establish them in the true religion, namely, in the worship of the one true God, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and given them the possession of that good land, the land of Canaan.

And now, finding himself weak and declining, being a hundred and ten years old, and fearing lest after his death the people should fall off from the true religion to the worship of idols, he, like a wise and good governor, considers with himself what course he had best to take to keep them firm and steadfast in their religion, and to prevent their defection to the idolatry of the nations round about them.

And to this end he calls a general assembly of all Israel, that is, of the elders, and heads, and judges, and officers of the several tribes; and, in a very wise and eloquent speech, represents to them in what a miraculous manner God had driven out the nations before them, much greater and stronger nations than they, and had given them

Chap. xxiii. 1.

their land to possess it; and, in a word, had performed punctually all that he had promised to them.

And therefore they ought "to take great heed to themselves, to love God, and to serve him;" and if they did not, he tells them that it should come to pass, "that as all good things are come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you." Chap. xxiii. 15.

After this, he calls them together a second time, and gives them a brief historical account and deduction of the great mercies of God to them and their fathers, from the days of Abraham, whom he had called out from among his idolatrous kindred and countrymen, unto that day.

From the consideration of all which, he earnestly exhorts them to renew their covenant with God; and for his particular satisfaction, before he left the world, solemnly to promise that they would for ever serve God and forsake the service of idols: "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord."

And then in the text by a very elegant scheme of speech he does, as it were, once more set them at liberty; and, as if they had never engaged themselves to God by covenant before, he leaves them to their free choice: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods whom your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell."

Not that they were at liberty whether they would

serve the true God, or not; but to insinuate to them that religion ought to be their free choice: and likewise that the true religion hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any considerate man's choice—"If it seem evil unto you;" as if he had said, If, after all the demonstrations which God hath given, of his miraculous presence among you, and the mighty obligations which he hath laid upon you by bringing you out of the land of Egypt, and the house of bondage by so outstretched an arm; and by driving out the nations before you, and giving you their land to possess: if, after all this, you can think it fit to quit the service of this God, and to worship the idols of the nations whom you have subdued, those vanquished and baffled deities: if you can think it reasonable so to do, but surely you cannot, then take your choice: "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve."

And to direct and encourage them to make a right choice, he declares to them his own resolution, which he hopes will also be their's; and as he had heretofore been their captain, so now he offers himself to be their example: but, whether they will follow him or not, he for his part is fixed and immoveable in his resolution; "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In effect he tells them—I have proposed the best religion to your choice, and I cannot but think, nay I cannot but hope, that you will all steadfastly adhere to it. It is so reasonable and wise, so much your interest and your happiness to do it. But if you should do otherwise, if you should be so weak as not to discern the truth, so wilful and so wicked as not to embrace it: though you should all make an-

other choice, and run away from the true God to the worship of idols; I for my part am steadfastly resolved what to do: in a case so manifest, in a matter so reasonable, no number, no example shall prevail with me to the contrary; I will, if need be, stand alone in that which is so evidently and unquestionably right: and though this whole nation should revolt all at once from the worship of the true God, and join with the rest of the world in a false religion and in the worship of idols; and mine were the only family left in all Israel, nay in the whole world, that continued to worship the God of Israel, I would still be of the same mind; I would still persist in this resolution, and act according to it; "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

A resolution truly worthy of so great a prince and so good a man: in which he is a double pattern to us.

First, Of the brave resolution of a good man, namely, that if there were occasion, and things were brought to that extremity, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of the true religion: "As for me, I will serve the Lord."

Secondly, Of the pious care of a good father and master of a family, to train up those under his charge in the true religion and worship of God: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

I shall at this time, by God's assistance, treat of the first of these; namely,

I. Of the brave resolution of a good man, that if there were occasion, and things were brought to that extremity, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of God's true religion: "Choose you this day (says Joshua) whom ye will serve; but as for me, I will serve the Lord." Joshua here

puts the case at the utmost extremity, that not only the great nations of the world, the Egyptians and Chaldeans, and all the lesser nations round about them, and in whose land they dwelt, were all long since revolted to idolatry, and pretended great antiquity and long prescription for the worship of their false gods: but he supposeth yet farther, that the only true and visible church of God then known in the world, the people of Israel, should likewise generally revolt and forsake the worship of the true God, and cleave to the service of idols: yet in this case, if we could suppose it to happen, he declares his firm and steadfast resolution to adhere to the worship of the true God: and though all others should fall off from it, that he would stand alone in the profession and practice of the true religion: "But as for me, I will serve the Lord."

In the handling of this argument I shall do these two things.

First, I shall consider the matter of this resolution, and the due bounds and limits of it.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to vindicate the reasonableness of this resolution from the objections to which this singular and peremptory kind of resolution may seem liable.

First, I shall consider the matter of this resolution, and the due bounds and limits of it.

1. The matter of this resolution. Joshua here resolves, that if need were, and things were brought to that pass, he would stand alone, or with very few adhering to him, in the profession and practice of the true religion. And this is not a mere supposition of an impossible case, which can never happen; for it may, and hath really and in fact happened in several ages and places of the world.

There hath been a general apostacy of some great part of God's church from the belief and profession of the true religion to idolatry, and to damnable errors and heresies: and some good men have, upon the matter, stood alone in the open profession of the true religion, in the midst of this general defection from it.

Elijah, in that general revolt of the people of Israel, when they had "forsaken the covenant of the Lord, and broken down his altars, and slain his prophets," and he only, as he thought, was left to stand alone: I say, in this case, when, as he verily believed, he had nobody to stand by him, he was very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts, and with an undaunted courage stood up for the worship of the true God, and reproved Ahab to his face for his defection to the worship of idols.

1 Kings xviii. 18.

And those three brave youths, in the prophecy of Daniel, did in the like resolute and undaunted manner refuse to obey the command of the great King Nebuchadnezzar, "to worship the image which he had set up," when all others submitted and paid honour to it: telling him plainly, "If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us" out of thy hand. "If not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Dan. iii.

Ver. 17, 18.

In like manner, and with the same spirit and courage, Daniel withstood the decree of Darius, which forbade men to "ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king only;" and this under the pain of being cast into the

Dan. vi. 7.

den of lions: and when all others gave obedience to it, he "set open the windows of his chamber towards Jerusalem, and kneeled down upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks, as he did aforetime." Ver. 10.

In the prevalency of the Arian heresy, Athanasius almost stood alone in the profession and maintenance of the truth. And in the reign of antichrist, the true church of God is represented by a woman flying into the wilderness, and living there in obscurity for a long time; insomuch, that the professors of the truth should hardly be found. And yet, during that degeneracy of so great a part of the Christian church, and the prevalency of antichrist for so many ages, some few in every age did appear, who did resolutely own the truth and bear witness to it with their blood: but these did almost stand alone and by themselves, like a few scattered sheep wandering up and down in a wide wilderness.

Thus, in the height of popery, Wickliffe appeared here in England; and Jerome of Prague and John Huss in Germany and Bohemia. And in the beginning of the Reformation, when popery had quite overrun these western parts of the world, and subdued her enemies on every side, and antichrist sat securely in the quiet possession of his kingdom, Luther arose, a bold and rough man, but a fit wedge to cleave in sunder so hard and knotty a block; and appeared stoutly against the gross errors and corruptions of the church of Rome; and for a long time stood alone, and with a most invincible spirit and courage maintained his ground, and resisted the united malice and force of antichrist and his adherents; and gave him so terrible a wound, that he is not yet perfectly healed and recovered of it.

So that for a man to stand alone, or with a very few adhering to him and standing by him, is not a mere imaginary supposition, but a case that hath really and in fact happened in several ages and places of the world. Let us then proceed to consider, in the

2. Second place, The due limits and bounds of this peremptory resolution. In all matters of faith and practice, which are plain and evident, either from natural reason, or from Divine revelation, this resolution seems to be very reasonable; but in things doubtful, a modest man, and every man hath reason to be so, would be very apt to be staggered by the judgment of a very wise man; and much more of many such, and especially by the unanimous judgment of the generality of men; the general voice and opinion of mankind being next to the voice of God himself.

For in matters of an indifferent nature, which God hath neither commanded nor forbidden, such as are many of the circumstances and ceremonies of God's worship, a man would not be singular, much less stiff and immoveable, in his singularity; but would be apt to yield and surrender himself to the general vote and opinion, and to comply with the common custom and practice; and much more with the rules and constitutions of authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical. Because in things lawful and indifferent, we are bound by the rules of decency and civility not to thwart the general practice; and by the commands of God, we are certainly obliged to obey the lawful commands of lawful authority.

But in things plainly contrary to the evidence of sense or reason, or to the word of God, a man would

compliment no man, or number of men; nor would he pin his faith upon any church in the world; much less upon any single man—no, not the pope; no, though there were never so many probable arguments brought for the proof of his infallibility.

In this case, a man would be singular, and stand alone against the whole world; against the wrath and rage of a king and all the terrors of his fiery furnace; as in other matters, a man would not believe all the learned men in the world against the clear evidence of sense and reason. If all the great mathematicians of all ages, Archimedes, and Euclid, and Apollonius, and Diophantus, &c. could be supposed to meet together in a general council, and should there declare, in the most solemn manner, and give it under their hands and seals, that twice two did not make four, but five, this would not move me in the least to be of their mind; nay, I, who am no mathematician, would maintain the contrary, and would persist in it, without being in the least startled by the positive opinion of these great and learned men; and should most certainly conclude, that they were either all of them out of their wits, or that they were biassed by some interest or other, and swayed against the clear evidence of truth, and the full conviction of their own reason, to make such a determination as this. They might indeed overrule the point by their authority; but in my inward judgment I should still be where I was before.

Just so in matters of religion: if any church, though with never so glorious and confident a pretence to infallibility, should declare for transubstantiation, that is, that the bread and wine in the sacrament, by virtue of the consecration of the priest,

are substantially changed into the natural body and blood of Christ; this is so notoriously contrary both to the sense and reason of mankind, that a man should choose to stand single in the opposition of it, and laugh at, or rather pity, the rest of the world, that could be so servilely blind as seemingly to conspire in the belief of so monstrous an absurdity.

And in like manner, if any church should declare, that images are to be worshipped, or that the worship of God is to be performed in an unknown tongue; and that the Holy Scriptures, which contain the word and will of God, and teach men what they are to believe and do in order to their eternal salvation, are to be locked up and kept concealed from the people in a language which they do not understand, lest, if they were permitted the free use of them in their mother tongue, they should know more of the mind and will of God than is convenient for the common people to know, whose devotion and obedience to the church does mainly depend upon their ignorance; or should declare, that the sacrifice of Christ was not offered once for all, but is and ought to be repeated ten millions of times every day; and that the people ought to receive the communion in one kind only, and the cup by no means to be trusted with them, for fear the profane beards of the laity should drink of it; and that the saving efficacy of the sacraments doth depend upon the intention of the priest, without which the receiver can have no benefit by them—these are all of them so plainly contrary to Scripture, and most of them in reason so absurd, that the authority of no church whatsoever can oblige a man to the belief of them.

Nay, I go yet further; that, being evidently contrary to the doctrine of the gospel, though an apostle or an angel from heaven should declare them, we ought to reject them. And for this I have St. Paul's authority and warrant, who, speaking of some that perverted the gospel of Christ by teaching things contrary to it, "Though we (says he), or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed: as we said before, so say I now again, though an apostle, though an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which ye have received, let him be accursed." You see he repeats it over again, to express, not only his own confident assurance, but the certainty of the thing. And here is an anathema with a witness, which we may confidently oppose to all the anathemas which the council of Trent hath so liberally denounced against all those who shall presume to gainsay these new doctrines of their church; which are in truth another gospel than that which our blessed Saviour and his apostles taught: and yet on their side there is neither an apostle nor an angel from heaven in the case. Gal. i. 8, 9.

To give but one instance more: if Bellarmine shall tell me, as he expressly does, that if the pope should declare virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue, I were bound to believe him, unless I would sin against conscience: and if all the world should say the same that Bellarmine does, namely, that this infallible declarer of virtue and vice were to be believed and followed; yet I could not possibly be of their mind, for this plain and undeniable reason—because, if virtue and vice be all one, then religion is nothing; since the main design of religion is to

teach men the difference between virtue and vice, and to oblige them to practise the one and to refrain from the other: and if religion be nothing, then heaven and hell are nothing, and if heaven be nothing, then an infallible guide thither is of no use and to no manner of purpose, because he is a guide no whither, and so his great office ceases and falls of itself.

And now, lest any should think me singular in this assertion, and that thereby I give a great deal too much to the single judgment of private persons, and too little to the authority of a church, I will produce the deliberate judgment of a very learned man, and a great assertor of the church's authority, concerning the matter I am now speaking of—I mean Mr. Hooker, in his deservedly-admired book of Ecclesiastical Polity. His words are these: "I grant," says he, "that proof derived from the authority of man's judgment is not able to work that assurance which doth grow by a stronger proof: and therefore, although ten thousand general councils should set down one and the same definitive sentence concerning any point of religion whatsoever, yet one demonstrative reason alleged, or one testimony cited from the word of God himself to the contrary, could not choose but oversway them all: inasmuch as for them to be deceived it is not so impossible, as it is that demonstrative reason or Divine testimony should deceive."

And again: "For men," says he, "to be tied and led by authority, as it were with a kind of captivity of judgment, and though there be reason to the contrary not to listen to it, but follow like beasts the first in the herd, this were brutish."

Again: "That the authority of men should prevail

with men, either against or above reason is no part of our belief. Companies of learned men, though they be never so great and reverend, are to yield unto reason, the weight whereof is no whit prejudiced by the simplicity of the person which doth allege it; but being found to be sound and good, the bare opinion of men to the contrary must of necessity stoop and give place." And this he delivers not only as his own particular judgment, but that which he apprehended to be the judgment of the church of England.

I have produced these clear and positive testimonies of so learned and judicious a person, and of so great esteem in our church, on purpose to prevent any misapprehension; as if by this discourse I intended to derogate from the authority of the church, and her just and reasonable determinations, in things nowise contrary to plain reason or the word of God. And beyond this pitch no judicious protestant, that I know of, ever strained the authority of the church. I proceed now, in the

Second place, To vindicate the reasonableness of this resolution from the objections to which this singular and peremptory kind of resolution may seem liable; as,

1st, It may very speciously be said, that this does not seem modest for a man to set up his own private judgment against the general suffrage and vote. Obj. I. And it is very true, as I said before, that about things indifferent a man should not be stiff and singular; and in things doubtful and obscure a man should not be over-confident of his own judgment, and insist peremptorily upon it against the general opinion: but in things that are plain and evident, either from Scripture or

reason, it is neither immodesty, nor a culpable singularity, for a man to stand alone in defence of the truth. Because in such a case a man does not oppose his own single and private judgment to the judgment of many, but the common reason of mankind and the judgment of God plainly declared in his word.

If the generality of men should turn atheists and infidels, and should deny the being of God or his providence; the immortality of men's souls, and the rewards and punishments of another world; or should deny the truth of the gospel and of the Christian religion; it would not certainly be any breach of modesty for a man to appear single, if nobody else would stand by him, in the resolute defence of those great truths.

In like manner, when a whole church, though never so large and numerous, shall conspire together to corrupt the Christian religion so far as to impoes upon mankind, under the name of Christian doctrines and articles of faith, things plainly contrary to the sense and reason of mankind, and to the clear and express word of God, why must a man be thought immodest, if he oppose such gross errors and corruptions of the Christian doctrine? And what reason have the church of Rome to talk of modesty in this case, when they themselves have the face to impose upon mankind the belief of things contrary to what they and every man else sees? as they do in their doctrine of transubstantiation: and to require of them to do what God hath expressly forbidden? as in the worship of images; besides a great many other idolatrous practices of that church; to deny the people the free use of the Holy Scriptures, and the public service of God in a known tongue, contrary to the

very end and design of all religion, and in affront to the common reason and liberty of mankind.

Obj. II. 2dly, It is pretended, that it is more prudent for private persons to err with the church, than to be so pertinacious in their own opinions. To which I answer, that it may indeed be pardonable in some cases to be led into mistake by the authority of those to whose judgment and instruction we ought to pay a great deference and submission, provided always it be in things which are not plain and necessary; but surely it can never be prudent to err with any number, how great soever, in matters of religion which are of moment, merely for numbers' sake: but to comply with the known errors and corruptions of any church whatsoever is certainly damnable.

Obj. III. 3dly, It is pretended yet further, that men shall sooner be excused in following the church, than any particular man or sect. To this I answer, that it is very true, if the matter be doubtful, and especially if the probabilities be equal, or near equal, on both sides: but if the error be gross and palpable, it will be no excuse to have followed any number of men, or any church whatsoever. For here the competition is not between men and men, but between God and men: and in this case we must forsake all men to follow God and his truth. "Thou shalt in no wise follow a multitude in a known error," is a rule which in reason is of equal obligation with that Divine law, "Thou shalt in no wise follow a multitude to do evil;" or rather is comprehended in it; because, to comply with a known error is certainly to do evil.

And this very objection the Jews made against our blessed Saviour and the doctrine which he

taught—that the guides and governors of the Jewish church did utterly differ from him, and were of a contrary mind: "Have any of the rulers," say they, "believed on him?" What! will you be wiser than your rulers and governors? What! follow the doctrine of one single man against the unanimous judgment and sentence of the great Sanhedrin, to whom the trial of doctrines and pretended prophets doth of right belong?

But, as plausible as this objection may seem to be, it is to be considered, that, in a corrupt and degenerate church, the guides and rulers of it are commonly the worst, and the most deeply engaged in the errors and corruptions of it. They brought them in at first; and their successors, who have been bred up in the belief and practice of them, are concerned to uphold and maintain them: and so long a prescription gives a kind of sacred stamp even to error, and an authority not to be opposed and resisted.

And thus it was in the corrupt state of the Jewish church in our Saviour's time: and so likewise in that great degeneracy of the Christian church, in the times of popery—their rulers made them to err: insomuch, that when Martin Luther appeared, in opposition to the errors and superstitions of that church, and was hard pressed with this very objection which the pharisees urged against our Saviour, he was forced to bolt out a kind of unmannerly truth, *Religio nunquam magis periclitatur quam inter reverendissimos:* "Religion (says he) is never in greater hazard and worse treated, than amongst the most reverend;" meaning the pope and his cardinals, and all the Romish hierarchy who had their dependance upon them.

4thly, It is objected, that as, on the one hand, there may be danger of error in following blindly the belief of the church, so, on the other hand, there is as great a danger of schism in forsaking the communion of the church, upon pretence of errors and corruptions. Very true: but where great errors and corruptions are not only pretended, but are real and evident; and where our compliance with those errors and corruptions is made a necessary condition of our communion with that church; in that case, the guilt of schism, how great a crime soever it be, doth not fall upon those who forsake the communion of that church, but upon those who drive them out of it by the sinful conditions which they impose upon them. Object. IV.

And this is truly the case between us and the church of Rome, as we are ready to make good, and have fully done it upon all occasions; and they have never yet been able to vindicate and clear themselves of those gross errors and corruptions which have been charged upon them, and which they require of all their members as necessary conditions of communion with them here, and of eternal salvation hereafter.

For we do not object to them doubtful matters, but things as plain as any are contained in the Bible; as every body would see if they durst but let every body read it. The worship of images is there as plainly forbidden in the decalogue, as murder and adultery are. The communion in both kinds is as express an institution of our Saviour, as any in all the New Testament; and even as the sacrament of the Lord's supper itself: only that church pretends to a dispensing power, as a privilege inherent in their church, and inseparable from it.

And to add but one instance more—public prayers, and the service of God in an unknown tongue, are as plainly and fully declared against by St. Paul in a long chapter upon this single argument, as any one thing in all his Epistles.

These things are plain and undeniable; and being so, are a full justification, not only of the church of England, in the Reformation which she thought fit to make within herself from the gross errors and corruptions of the church of Rome; but likewise of particular persons, who have at any time for the same reasons withdrawn themselves from her communion, in any of the popish countries: yea, though that single person should happen to be in those circumstances, that he could not have the opportunity of holding communion with any other church, that was free from those errors and corruptions, and which did not impose them as necessary conditions of communion.

For if any church fall off to idolatry, every good Christian not only may, but ought, to forsake her communion; and ought rather to stand single and alone in the profession of the pure and true religion, than to continue in the communion of a corrupt and idolatrous church.

I know that some men are so fond of the name of a church, that they can very hardly believe, that any thing which bears that glorious title can miscarry, or do any thing so much amiss, as to give just occasion to any of her members to break off from her communion. What! the church err? That is such an absurdity, as is by many thought sufficient to put any objection out of countenance. That the whole church, that is, that all the Christians in the world, should at any time fall off to idolatry, and into errors and

practices directly contrary to the Christian doctrine revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is on all hands, I think, denied: but that any particular church may fall into such errors and practices, is, I think, as universally granted: only in this case they demanded to have the Roman catholic church excepted: and why, I pray? because, though the Roman church is a particular church, it is also the universal church: if this can be, and good sense can be made of a particular universal church, then the Roman church may demand this high privilege of being exempted from the fate of all other churches; but if the Roman catholic, that is, a particular universal church, be a gross and palpable contradiction, then it is plain that the church of Rome hath no more pretence to this privilege, than any other particular church whatsoever.

And, which is yet more, some men talk of these matters at that rate, as, if a man, who thought himself obliged to quit the communion of the church of Rome, should happen to be in those circumstances, that he had no opportunity of joining himself to any other communion, he ought in that case to give over all thoughts of religion, and not to be so conceited and presumptuous as to think of going to heaven alone by himself.

It is without doubt a very great sin to despise the communion of the church, or to break off from it so long as we can continue in it without sin: but if things should once come to that pass that we must either disobey God for company, or stand alone in our obedience to him, we ought most certainly to obey God, whatever comes of it; and to profess his truth, whether any body else will join with us in that profession or not.

And they who speak otherwise condemn the

whole Reformation, and do in effect say, that Martin Luther had done a very ill thing in breaking off from the church of Rome, if nobody else would have joined with him in that honest design. And yet, if it had been so, I hope God would have given him the grace and courage to have stood alone in so good and glorious a cause, and to have laid down his life for it.

And for any man to be of another opinion, is just as if a man upon great deliberation should choose rather to be drowned, than to be saved either by a plank or a small boat; or to be carried into the harbour any other way, than in a great ship of so many hundred tons.

In short, a good man must resolve to obey God, and to profess his truth, though all the world should happen to do otherwise. Christ hath promised to preserve his church to the end of the world; that is, he hath engaged his word that he will take care that there shall always be, in some part of the world or other, some persons that shall make a sincere profession of his true religion.

But he hath nowhere promised to preserve any one part of his church from such errors and corruptions as may oblige all good men to quit the communion of that part; yea, though when they have done so, they may not know whither to resort for actual communion with any other sound part of the Christian church. As it happened to some particular persons, during the reign and rage of popery in these western parts of the Christian church.

The result from all this discourse is, to confirm and establish us all, in this hour of temptation and of the powers of darkness, in the well-grounded belief of the necessity and justice of our Reformation from the errors and corruptions of the Roman

church: and to engage us to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and not only to profess and promise, as Peter did to our Lord, "though all men forsake thee, yet will not I;" but, if there should be occasion, to perform and make good this promise, with the hazard of all that is dear to us, and even of life itself: and whatever trials God may permit any of us to fall into, to take up the pious resolution of Joshua here in the text, that, whatever others do, "we will serve the Lord."

I will conclude my discourse upon this first particular in the text, with the exhortation of St. Paul to the Philippians: (Chap. i. ver. 27.) "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ Stand fast in one spirit, be of one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. In nothing terrified by your adversaries; which to them is an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God."

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to the first thing in the text, namely, the pious resolution of Joshua; that if there were occasion, and things were brought to that extremity, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of God's true religion: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; but, as for me, I will serve the Lord."

I should now have proceeded to the second thing, and which indeed I chiefly intended to speak to from this text, namely, the pious care of a good father and master of a family, to train up those under his charge in the religion and worship of the true God: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." But this I shall not now enter upon, but defer it to some other opportunity. Consider what ye have heard, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

SERMON L.

[Preached at St. Lawrence-Jewry, July 13, 1684.]

CONCERNING FAMILY RELIGION.

——*But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*—JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

I SHALL now proceed to the second point contained in the text, namely,

II. The pious care of a good master and father of a family, to train up those under his charge in the worship and service of the true God: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

And this is the more necessary to be spoken to, because it is a great and very essential part of religion; but strangely overlooked and neglected in this loose and degenerate age in which we live. It is a great part of religion: for, next to our personal homage and service to Almighty God, and the care of our own souls, it is incumbent upon us to make those, who are under our charge, and subject to our authority, God's subjects, and his children and servants; which is a much more honourable and happy relation than that which they bear to us.

Our children are a natural part of ourselves, and the rest of our family are a civil and political part: and not only we ourselves, but all that we have and that belongs to us is God's, and ought to be devoted to his service. And they that have the true fear of God themselves will be careful to teach it to others; to those especially who are under their

more immediate care and instruction. And therefore God had so great a confidence concerning Abraham as to this particular, as to undertake for him, that, being so very good a man himself, he would not fail in so great and necessary a part of his duty. "For I know him," says God of him, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." God passeth his word for him, that he would not only take care to instruct his children and the rest of his family in the true religion, but that he would likewise lay a strict charge upon them to propagate and transmit it to their posterity.

And this certainly is the duty of all fathers and masters of families; and an essential part of religion, next to serving God in our own persons, to be very careful that all that belong to us do the same. For every man must not only give an account of himself to God, but of those likewise that are committed to his charge, that they do not miscarry through his neglect.

In speaking of this great and necessary duty, I shall do these four things:

First, I shall shew wherein it doth consist.

Secondly, I shall consider our obligation to it, both in point of duty and of interest.

Thirdly, I shall inquire into the causes of the so common and shameful neglect of this duty, to the exceeding great decay of piety amongst us.

Fourthly, As a motive and argument to us to endeavour to retrieve the practice of this duty, I shall represent to you the pernicious consequences of the neglect of it, both with regard to ourselves and to the public. In all which I shall be very brief, because things that are plain need not to be long.

I. I shall shew wherein the practice of this duty doth consist. And in this I am sure there is no need to be long, because this duty is much better known than practised. The principal parts of it are these following:

First, By setting up the constant worship of God in our families. By daily prayers to God, every morning and evening: and by reading some portion of the Holy Scriptures at those times, especially out of the Psalms of David, and the New Testament. And this is so necessary to keep alive and to maintain a sense of God and religion in the minds of men, that where it is neglected I do not see how any family can in reason be esteemed a family of Christians, or indeed to have any religion at all.

And there are not wanting excellent helps to this purpose for those that stand in need of them, as I think most families do for the due and decent discharge of this solemn duty of prayer: I say, there are excellent helps to this purpose, in the several books of devotion calculated for the private use of families, as well as for secret prayers in our closets.

So that, besides the reading of the Holy Scriptures, which are the great fountains of Divine truth; we may do well likewise to add to these other pious and profitable books, which by their plainness are fitted for the instruction of all capacities in the most necessary points of belief and practice: of which sort, God be thanked, there is an abundant store; but none that I think is more fitted for general and constant use than that excellent book so well known by the title of the Whole Duty of Man; because it is conveniently divided into parts or sections; one of which may be read in the family at any time when there is leisure for it; but more especially on the

Lord's day, when the whole family may more easily be brought and kept together, and have the opportunity to attend upon these things without distraction.

And, which I must by no means omit, because it is in many families already gone, and in others going out of fashion—I mean a solemn acknowledgment of the providence of God, by begging his blessing at our meals, upon his good creatures provided for our use; and by returning thanks to him for the benefit and refreshment of them: this being a piece of natural religion owned and practised in all ages, and in most places of the world; but never so shamefully and scandalously neglected, and I fear by many slighted and despised, as it is amongst us at this day: and most neglected where there is the greatest reason for the doing of it—I mean, at the most plentiful tables, and among those of highest quality: as if great persons were ashamed, or thought scorn to own from whence these blessings come; like the nation of the Jews, of whom God complains in the prophet, "She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." "She knew not;" that is, she would not acknowledge from whose bounty all these blessings came: or, as if the poor were obliged to thank God for a little, but those who are fed to the full, and whose cups overflow, so that they are almost every day surfeited of plenty, were not at least equally bound to make returns of thankful acknowledgment to the great Giver of all good things; and to implore His bounty and blessing, upon whom "the eyes of all do wait," that "He may give them their meat in due season." Hos. ii. 8.

O crooked and perverse generation! do you thus reason? do you thus requite the Lord, foolish and

unwise? this is a very sad and broad sign of the prevalency of atheism and infidelity among us, when so natural and so reasonable a piece of religion, so meet and equal an acknowledgment of the constant and daily care and providence of Almighty God towards us, begins to grow out of date and use, in a nation professing religion, and the belief of the being and providence of God. Is it not a righteous thing with God to take away his blessings from us, when we deny him this just and easy tribute of praise and thanksgiving? Shall not God visit for this horrible ingratitude? and shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Hear, O heavens, and be ye horribly astonished at this! I hope it cannot be thought misbecoming the meanest of God's ministers, in a matter wherein the honour of God is so nearly concerned, to reprove, even in the highest and greatest of the sons of men, so shameful and heinous a fault, with a proportionable vehemence and severity.

Secondly, Another, and that also a very considerable part of this duty, consists in instructing those committed to our charge in the fundamental principles, and in the careful practice of the necessary duties, of religion; instilling these into children in their tender years, as they are capable of them, "line upon line;" and "precept upon precept, here a little and there a little;" and into those that are more grown up, by proper and suitable means of instruction, and by furnishing them with such books as are most proper to teach them those things in religion which are most necessary by all to be believed and practised.

And in order hereunto we should take care that those under our charge, our children and servants,

should be taught to read, because this will make the business of instruction much easier; so that if they are diligent and well-disposed, they may, after having been taught the first principles of religion, by reading the Holy Scriptures and other good books, greatly improve themselves, so as to be prepared to receive much greater benefit and advantage by the public teaching of their ministers.

And in this work of instruction our great care should be to plant those principles of religion in our children and servants which are most fundamental and necessary, and are like to have the greatest and most lasting influence upon their whole lives: as right and worthy apprehensions of God, especially of his infinite goodness, and that "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity:" and a lively sense also of the great evil and danger of sin: a firm belief of the immortality of our souls, and of the unspeakable and endless rewards and punishments of another wrold. If these principles once take root, they will spread strangely, and probably stick by them, and continue with them, all their days.

Whereas, if we plant in them doubtful doctrines and opinions, and inculcate upon them the notions of a sect, and the jargon of a party, this will turn to a very pitiful account, and we must expect that our harvest will be answerable to our husbandry: "we have sown the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind." But of this I shall have occasion to speak more particularly and fully in the ensuing Sermons concerning the good education of children.

And this work of instruction of those that are under our charge, as it ought not to be neglected at other times, so is it more peculiarly seasonable on the Lord's day, which ought to be employed by us

to religious purposes, and in the exercises of piety and devotion: chiefly in the public worship and service of God, upon which we should take care that our children and servants should diligently and devoutly attend. Because there God affords the means which he hath appointed for the begetting and increasing of piety and goodness, and to which he hath promised a more especial blessing: there they will have the opportunity of joining in the public prayers of God's church, and of sharing in the unspeakable benefit and advantage of them: and there they will also have the advantage of being instructed by the ministers of God in the doctrine of salvation, and the way to eternal life; and of being powerfully incited to the practice of piety and virtue.

There likewise they will be invited to the Lord's table, to participate of the holy sacrament of Christ's most blessed body and blood; which, being the most solemn institution of the Christian religion, the frequent participation whereof is, by our blessed Lord, in remembrance of his dying love, enjoined upon all Christians, we ought to take a very particular care, that those who are under our charge, so soon as they are capable of it, be duly instructed and prepared for it; that so, as often as opportunity is offered for it, they may be present at this holy action, and partake of the inestimable benefits and comforts of it.

And when the public worship of that day is over, our families should be instructed at home, by having the Scriptures and other good books read to them; and care likewise should be taken that they do this themselves; this being the chief opportunity that most of them, especially those that are servants,

have of minding the business of religion, and thinking seriously of another world.

And therefore I cannot but think it of very great consequence to the maintaining and keeping alive of religion in the world, that this day be religiously observed, and spent as much as may be in the exercises of piety, and in the care of our souls. For surely every one that hath a true sense of religion will grant, that it is necessary that some time should be solemnly set apart for this purpose, which is of all other our greatest concernment: and they who neglect this so proper season and opportunity, will hardly find any other time for it: especially those who are under the government and command of others, as children and servants, who are seldom upon any other day allowed to be so much masters of their time, as upon this day.

Thirdly, I add further, as a considerable part of the duty of parents and masters of families, if they be desirous to have their children and servants religious in good earnest, and would set them forward in the way to heaven, that they do not only allow time and opportunity, but that they do also strictly and earnestly charge them to retire themselves every day; but more especially on the Lord's day, morning and evening, to pray to God for the forgiveness of their sins, and for his mercy and blessings upon them; and likewise to praise him for all his favours and benefits conferred upon them from day to day.

And in order to this, they ought to take care that their children and servants be furnished with such short forms of prayer and praise, as are proper and suitable to their capacities and conditions respectively; because there are but very few that know

how to set about and perform these duties, especially at first, without some helps of this kind.

Fourthly and lastly, Another principal part of this duty consists in giving good example to our families. This was David's resolution: (Psalm ci. 2.) "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Take great care to be exemplary to thy family in the best things; in a constant and devout serving of God, and in a sober and prudent and unblameable conversation.

One of the best and most effectual ways to make those who are under our care and authority good, is to be good ourselves, and by our good example to shew them the way to be so. Without this our best instructions will signify but very little, and the main force and efficacy of them will be lost. We undermine the best instructions we can give, when they are not seconded and confirmed by our own example and practice. The want of this will weaken the authority of all our good counsel, and very little reverence and obedience will be paid to it. The precepts and admonitions of a very good man have in them a great power of persuasion, and are apt strongly to move and to inflame others to go and do likewise: but the good instructions of a bad man are languid and faint, and of very little force: because they give no heart and encouragement to follow that counsel which they see he that gives it does not think fit to take himself. But of this likewise I shall have occasion to speak more fully in the following discourses concerning the good education of children. And thus much may suffice to have been spoken of the first thing which I proposed, namely, wherein the

practice of this duty doth consist. I proceed to the second; namely,

II. To consider our obligation to it, both in point of duty and of interest.

First, In point of duty. All authority over others is a talent intrusted with us by God for the benefit and good of others; and for which we are accountable, if we do not improve it and make use of it to that end. We are obliged by all lawful means to provide for the temporal welfare of our family, to feed and clothe their bodies, and to give them a comfortable subsistence here in the world: and surely much more are we obliged to take care of their souls, and to consult their eternal happiness in another life; in comparison of which all temporal concernments and considerations are as nothing.

It would be accounted a very barbarous thing in a father or master to suffer a child to starve for want of the necessaries of life, food, and raiment, and all the world would cry shame upon them for it: but how much greater cruelty must it in reason be thought to let an immortal soul, and one for whom Christ died, perish for want of knowledge and necessary instruction for the attaining of eternal salvation?

The apostle St. Paul thinks no words bad enough for those who neglect the temporal welfare of their families: "He that provideth not (saith he) for his own, especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel;" that is, he does not deserve the name of a Christian, who neglects a duty to which, from the plain dictates of nature, a heathen thinks himself obliged. What then shall be said for them who take no care to provide for the everlasting happiness, and to pre-

vent the eternal misery and ruin of those who are so immediately under their charge, and so very nearly related to them?

We are obliged to procure the happiness of our children, not only by the laws of Christianity, but likewise by all the natural bonds of duty and affection. For our children are a part of ourselves, and if they perish by our fault and neglect, it will be a perpetual wound and sting to us; their blood will be upon our heads, and the guilt of it will for ever lie at our doors.

Nay, we are obliged likewise in justice, and by way of reparation, to take all possible care of their happiness; for we have conveyed a sad inheritance to them, in those corrupt and evil inclinations which they have derived from us; and therefore we should, with the greatest care and diligence, endeavour to rectify their perverse natures, and to cure those cursed dispositions to evil which we have transmitted to them: and since God hath been pleased in so much mercy to provide, by the abundant grace of the gospel, so powerful a remedy for this hereditary disease of our corrupt and degenerate nature, we should do what in us lies, that they may partake of the blessing and benefit of it.

And as to other members of our family, whether they be servants, or other relations, of whom we have taken the charge, common humanity will oblige us to be concerned for their happiness, as they are men of the same nature with ourselves; and charity likewise, as they are Christians and baptized into the same faith, and capable of the same common salvation, does yet more strictly oblige us by all means to endeavour that they may be made partakers of it; especially since they are committed to

our care, and for that reason we must expect to be accountable to God for them.

So that our obligation in point of duty is very clear and strong, and if we be remiss and negligent in the discharge of it, we can never answer it either to God, or to our own consciences; which I hope will awaken us all who are concerned in it to the serious consideration of it, and effectually engage us for the future to the faithful and conscientious performance of it.

Secondly, We are hereto likewise obliged in point of interest; because it is really for our service and advantage that those that belong to us should serve and fear God; religion being the best and surest foundation of the duties of all relations, and the best caution and security for the true discharge and performance of them.

Would we have dutiful and obedient children, diligent and faithful servants? Nothing will so effectually oblige them to be so, as the fear of God and the principles of religion firmly settled and rooted in them. Abraham, who by the testimony of God himself was so eminent an example in this kind, both of a good father and a good master of his family, found the good success of his religious care in the happy effects of it, both upon his son Isaac, and his chief servant and steward of his house, Eliezer of Damascus.

What an unexampled instance of the most profound respect and obedience to the commands of his father did Isaac give, when, without the least murmuring or reluctancy, he submitted to be bound, and laid upon the altar, and to have been slain for a sacrifice, if God had not by an angel, sent on purpose, interposed to prevent it?

What an admirable servant to Abraham was the steward of his house, Eliezer of Damascus? How diligent and faithful was he in his master's service? So that he trusted him in his greatest concernments and with all that he had. And when he employed him in that great affair, of the marriage of his son Isaac, what pains did he take, what prudence did he use, what fidelity did he shew in the discharge of that great trust, giving himself no rest till he had accomplished the business he was sent about? God seems purposely to have left these two instances upon record in Scripture, to encourage fathers and masters of families to a religious care of their children and servants.

And to shew the power of religion to oblige men to their duty, I will add but one instance more. How did the fear of God secure Joseph's fidelity to his master, in the case of a very great and violent temptation? When there was nothing else to restrain him from so lewd and wicked an act, and to which he was so powerfully tempted, the consideration of the great trust his master reposed in him, and the sense of his duty to him, but, above all, the fear of God preserved him from consenting to so vile and wicked an action: "How can I (says he) do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

So that in prudence, and from a wise consideration of the great benefit and advantage which will thereby redound to us, we ought with the greatest care to instil the principles of religion into those that belong to us. For if the seeds of true piety be sown in them, we shall reap the fruits of it; and if this be neglected, we shall certainly find the mischief and inconvenience of it. If our children and servants be not taught to fear and reverence God,

how can we expect that they should reverence and regard us? at least we can have no sure hold of them. For nothing but religion lays an obligation upon conscience, nor is there any other certain bond of duty, and obedience, and fidelity: men will break loose from all other ties, when a fit occasion and a fair opportunity doth strongly tempt them. And as religion is necessary to procure the favour of God, and all the comfort and happiness which that brings along with it, so it is necessary likewise to secure the mutual duties and offices of men to one another. I proceed to the third thing which I proposed; namely,

III. To inquire into the causes of the so common and shameful neglect of this duty, to the exceeding great decay of piety among us. And this may in part be ascribed to our civil confusions and distractions, but chiefly to our dissensions and differences in religion, which have not only divided and scattered our parochial churches and congregations, but have entered likewise into our families, and made great disturbances and disorders there.

First, This may in good part be ascribed to our civil confusions and distractions, which for the time do lay all laws asleep, and do not only occasion a general licentiousness and dissoluteness of manners, but have usually a proportionable bad influence upon the order and government of families; by weakening the authority of those that govern, and by giving the opportunity of greater licence to those that should be governed. For when public laws lose their authority, it is hard to maintain and keep up the strict rules and order of families, which, after a great and long disorder, are very hard to be retrieved and recovered.

Secondly, This great neglect and decay of religious order in families is chiefly owing to our dissensions and differences in religion, upon occasion whereof many, under the pretence of conscience, have broke loose into a boundless liberty. So that, among the manifold ill consequences of our divisions in religion, this is none of the least, that the religious order of families hath been in a great measure broken and dissolved. Some will not meet at the same prayers in the family, nor go to the same church and place of public worship; and upon that pretence take the liberty to do what they please, and, under colour of serving God in a different way, according to their consciences, do either wholly or in a great measure neglect the worship of God; nay, it is well if they do not at that time haunt and frequent places of debauchery and lewdness; which they may safely do, being from under the eye of their parents and masters: however, by this means it becomes impossible for the most careful masters of families, to take an account of those under their charge how they spend their time on the Lord's day, and to train them up in any certain and orderly way of religion.

And this methinks is so great and sensible an inconvenience, and hath had such dismal effects in many families, as ought effectually to convince us of the necessity of endeavouring a greater union in matters of religion; and to put us in mind of those happy days when God was served in one way, and whole families went to the house of God in companies; and fathers and masters had their children and servants continually under their eye, and they were all united in their worship and devotion, both in their own houses and in the house of God; and by this means

the work of religious education and instruction was effectually carried on, and a steady authority and decent order was maintained in families; men were edified and built up in religion, and God in all things was glorified.

And we may assure ourselves, that till we are better agreed in matters of religion, and our unhappy and childish differences are laid aside; and till the public and unanimous worship of God does in some measure recover its reputation, the good order and government of families, as to the great ends of religion, is never likely to obtain and to have any considerable effect. Which I hope will make all men, who heartily love God and religion, to consider seriously how necessary it is to put an end to these differences; that in our private families, as well as in the public assemblies of the church, we may "with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"I beseech you therefore, brethren," as St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment:" that is, so far as is necessary to the "keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and to prevent divisions and separations among Christians. I proceed to the fourth and last thing I proposed, and which remains to be very briefly spoken to; namely, 1 Cor. i. 10.

IV. The very mischievous and fatal consequences of the neglect of this duty, both to the public and to ourselves.

First, To the public. Families are the first seminaries of religion, and if care be not there taken to

prepare persons, especially in their tender years, for public teaching and instruction, it is like to have but very little effect. The neglect of a due preparation of our children and servants at home, to make them capable of profiting by what they hear and may learn at church, is like an error in the first concoction, which can hardly ever be corrected afterwards. So that in this first neglect the foundation of an infinite mischief is laid: because, if no care be taken of persons in their younger years, when they are most capable of the impressions of religion, how can it reasonably be expected that they should come to good afterwards? and if they continue void of the fear of God, which there hath been no care taken to plant in them, they will almost necessarily be bad in all relations; undutiful children, slothful and unfaithful servants, scandalous members of the church, unprofitable to the commonwealth, disobedient to governors, both ecclesiastical and civil; and, in a word, burdens of the earth, and so many plagues of human society: and this evil, if no remedy be applied to it, will continually grow worse, and diffuse and spread itself farther in every age, till impiety and wickedness, infidelity and profaneness, have overrun all, and the world be ripe for its final ruin: just as it was before the destruction of the old world, when "the wickedness of man was great upon the earth," and "all flesh had corrupted their way;" then "the flood came and swept them all away."

Secondly, The consequences of this neglect will likewise be very dismal to ourselves. We shall first of all others feel the inconvenience, as we had the greatest share in the guilt of it. We can have no manner of security of the duty and fidelity of those

of our family to us, if they have no sense of religion, no fear of God before their eyes. If we have taken no care to instruct them in their duty to God, it is nowise probable that they will make conscience of their duty to us.

So that we shall have the first ill consequences of their miscarriage, besides the shame and sorrow of it: and, not only so, but all the evil they commit ever after, will be in a great measure chargeable upon us, and will be put upon our score in the judgment of the great day. It ought to make us tremble to think with what bitterness and rage our children and servants will then fly in our faces, for having been the cause of their eternal ruin, for want of due care on our part to prevent it. In that day, next to God and our own consciences, our most terrible accusers will be those of our own house, nay, those that came out of our own bowels, and were not only part of our family, but even of ourselves. But this also I shall have a proper occasion to prosecute more fully in the following discourses concerning the education of children, to which I refer it.

Upon all these considerations, and many more that might be urged upon us, we should take up the pious resolution of Joshua here in the text, that "We and our houses will serve the Lord:" and that, through God's grace, we will do all that in us lies, by our future care and diligence, to repair our former neglects in this kind.

I shall only add this one consideration more to all that I have already mentioned: if children were carefully educated, and families regularly and religiously ordered, what a happy and delightful place, what a paradise would this world be, in comparison of what now it is?

I beseech you therefore, brethren, that these things which I have with so much plainness and faithfulness laid before you, may sink into your hearts, before it be too late, and whilst the thing may be remedied; that you may not for ever lament this neglect, and repent of it when the thing will be past remedy, and there will be no place for repentance. "But I hope better things of you, brethren, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak."

SERMON LI.

OF THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.—PROV. xxii. 6.

I HAVE on purpose chosen this text for the subject of a preparatory discourse, in order to the reviving of that so shamefully neglected, and yet most useful and necessary, duty, of catechising children and young persons: but I shall extend it to the consideration of the education of children in general, as a matter of the greatest consequence both to religion and the public welfare.

For we who are the ministers of God ought not only to instruct those who are committed to our charge in the common duties of Christianity, such as belong to all Christians, but likewise in all the particular duties which the several relations in which they stand to one another do respectively require and call for from them.

And amongst all these I know none that is of greater concernment to religion, and to the good order of the world, than the careful education of children. And there is hardly any thing that is more difficult, and which requires a more prudent and diligent and constant application of our best care and endeavour.

It is a known saying of Melancthon that there are three things which are extremely difficult, *parturire, docere, regere;* "to bear and bring forth children, to instruct and bring them up to be men, and to govern

them when they arrive at man's estate." The instruction and good education of children is none of the least difficult of these. For to do it to the best advantage, does not only require great sagacity to discern their particular disposition and temper, but great discretion to deal with them and manage them; and likewise continual care and diligent attendance to form them by degrees to religion and virtue.

It requires great wisdom and industry to advance a considerable estate, much art and contrivance and pains to raise a great and regular building: but the greatest and noblest work in the world, and an effect of the greatest prudence and care, is to rear and build up a man, and to form and fashion him to piety, and justice, and temperance, and all kind of honest and worthy actions. Now the foundations of this great work are to be carefully laid in the tender years of children, that it may rise and grow up with them; according to the advice of the wise man here in the text, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

In which words are contained these two things:

First, The duty of parents and instructors of children—"Train up a child," &c. By childhood here I understand the age of persons from their birth; but, more especially, from their first capacity of instruction till they arrive at the state and age which next succeeds childhood, and which we call youth; and which is the proper season for confirmation. For when children have been well catechised and instructed in religion, then is the fittest time for them to take upon themselves and in their own persons to confirm that solemn vow, which by their sureties they made at their baptism.

"Train up a child in the way he should go," that is, in the course of life that he ought to lead; instruct him carefully in the knowledge and practice of his whole duty to God and men, which he ought to observe and perform all the days of his life.

Secondly, Here is the consequent fruit and benefit of good education: "and when he is old he will not depart from it." This we are to understand according to the moral probability of things: not as if this happy effect did always and infallibly follow upon the good education of a child; but that this very frequently is, and may probably be presumed and hoped to be the fruit and effect of a pious and prudent education. Solomon means that, from the very nature of the thing, this is the most hopeful and likely way to train up a child to be a good man. For as Aristotle truly observes, Moral sayings and proverbial speeches are to be understood only ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ; that is, to be usually and for the most part true; and though there may be several exceptions made and instances given to the contrary, yet this doth not infringe the general truth of them: but if in frequent and common experience they be found true, this is all the truth that is expected in them, because it is all that was intended by them.

And of this nature is this aphorism or proverb of Solomon in the text; and so likewise are most of the wise sayings of this Book of Proverbs, as also of Ecclesiastes: and we do greatly mistake the design and meaning of them, whenever we go about to exact them to a more strict and rigorous truth, and shall upon due consideration find it impossible to bring them to it.

So that the true meaning of the text may be fully comprised in the following proposition:—

That the careful, and prudent, and religious education of children, hath for the most part a very good influence upon the whole course of their lives.

In the handling of this argument I design, by God's assistance, to reduce my discourse to these five heads.

I. I shall shew more generally wherein the good education of children doth consist, and severally consider the principal parts of it.

II. I shall give some more particular directions for the management of this work in such a way as may be most effectual for its end.

III. I shall take notice of some of the common and more remarkable miscarriages in the performance of this duty.

IV. I shall endeavour to make out the truth of this proposition, by shewing how the good education of children comes to be of so great advantage, and to have so powerful and lasting an influence upon their whole lives.

V. And, lastly, I shall, by the most powerful arguments I can offer, endeavour to stir up and persuade those, whose duty this is, to discharge it with great care and conscience.

I. I shall shew more generally wherein the good education of children doth consist, and severally consider the principal parts of it.—And under this head I shall comprehend promiscuously the duty of parents, and, in case of their death, of guardians; and of godfathers and godmothers; though this, for the most part, signifies very little more than a pious and charitable care and concernment for them, because the children for whom they are sureties are seldom under their power: and the duty likewise of those who are the teachers and instructors of them:

and the duty also of masters of families towards servants in their childhood and younger years: and, lastly, the duty of ministers, under whose parochial care and inspection children are as members of the families committed to their charge: I say, under this head I shall comprehend the duties of these respectively, according to the several obligations which lie upon each of them in their several relations to them. And I shall reduce them to these eight particulars, as the principal parts wherein the education of children doth consist.

First, In the tender and careful nursing of them.

Secondly, In bringing them to be baptized and admitted members of Christ's church, at the times appointed or accustomed in the national church of which the parents are members.

Thirdly, In a due care to inform and instruct them in the whole compass of their duty to God and to their neighbour.

Fourthly, And more especially, in a prudent and diligent care to form their lives and manners to religion and virtue.

Fifthly, In giving them good example.

Sixthly, In wise restraints from that which is evil, by seasonable reproof and correction.

Seventhly, In bringing them to be publicly catechised by the minister in order to confirmation.

Eighthly, In bringing them to the bishop to be solemnly confirmed, by their taking upon themselves the vow which by their sureties they entered into at their baptism.

I. In the tender and careful nursing of children. I mention this first, because it is the first and most natural duty incumbent upon parents towards their children; and this is particularly the duty of mothers.

This affection and tenderness, nature, which is our surest guide and director, hath implanted in all living creatures towards their young ones: and there cannot be a greater reproach to creatures that are endued with reason, than to neglect a duty to which nature directs even the brute creatures by a blind and unthinking instinct. So that it is such a duty as cannot be neglected without a downright affront to nature, and from which nothing can excuse but disability, or sickness, or the evident danger of the mother, or the interposition of the father's authority, or some very extraordinary and public necessity.

This I foresee will seem a very hard saying to nice and delicate mothers, who prefer their own ease and pleasure to the fruit of their own bodies: but whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, I think myself obliged to deal plainly in this matter, and to be so faithful as to tell them that this is a natural duty; and, because it is so, of a more necessary and indispensable obligation than any positive precept of revealed religion; and that the general neglect of it is one of the great and crying sins of this age and nation; and which, as much as any sin whatsoever, is evidently a punishment to itself in the palpable ill effects and consequences of it: which I shall, as briefly as I can, endeavour to represent; that if it be possible, we may, in this first point of education, so fundamental and necessary to the happiness both of parents and children, and consequently to the public good of human society, be brought to comply with the unerring instinct of nature, and with the plain dictate of the common reason of mankind, and the general practice of all ages and nations.

First, The neglect of this duty is a sort of ex-

posing of children; especially when it is not done, as very often it is not, with more than ordinary care and choice. It always exposeth them to manifest inconvenience, and sometimes to great danger; even to that degree, as in the consequence of it is but little better than the laying a child in the street, and leaving it to the care and compassion of a parish. There are two very visible inconveniences which do commonly attend it.

1st, Strange milk, which is often very disagreeable to the child, and with which the child to be sure sucks in the natural infirmities of the nurse, together with a great deal of her natural inclinations and irregular passions, which many times stick by the child for a long time after: and, which is worse than all this, it sometimes happens that some secret disease of the nurse is conveyed to the child.

2dly, A shameful and dangerous neglect of the child, especially by such nurses as make a trade of it; of whom there are great numbers in and about this great city; who, after they have made their first and main advantage of the child, by the excessive, not to say extravagant vails, which usually here in England, above all other places in the world, are given at christenings; and then by the strait allowances which are commonly made afterwards for the nursing and keeping of the child, are often tempted, not to say worse, to a great neglect of the child; which, if it happen to die for want of due care, sets the nurse at liberty to make a new advantage by taking another child.

Nor can it well be otherwise expected than that a nurse, who, by this course, is first made to be unnatural to her own child, should have no great care and tenderness for a child which is not her own.

I have heard a very sad observation made by those who have had the opportunity to know it, that in several of the towns and villages about London, where this trade of nursing children is chiefly driven, hardly one in five of these children lives out the year: and this surely is a danger, which natural affection as well as duty does oblige parents to take all possible care to prevent.

Secondly, This course doth most certainly tend very much to the estranging and weakening of natural affection on both sides; I mean both on the part of the mother and of the child. The pains of nursing as well as of bearing children, doth insensibly create a strange tenderness of affection and care in the mother. "Can a woman (says God) forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" "Can a woman;" that is, a mother, not a nurse: for the sucking child is said to be the son of her womb. God speaks of this as a thing next to impossible.

Isa. xlix. 15.

And this likewise is a great endearment of the mother to the child. Which endearment, when the child is put out, is transferred from the mother to the nurse, and many times continues to be so for a great many years after; yea, and often to that degree, as if the nurse were the true mother, and the true mother a mere stranger. So that by this means natural affection must be extremely weakened; which is great pity, because, when it is kept up in its full strength, it often proves one of the best securities of the duty of a child.

But because this severe doctrine will go down but very hardly with a great many, I must take the more care to guard it against the objections which

will be made to it. Those from natural disability, or sickness; from evident and apparent danger of the mother, or from the interposition of the father's authority, or from plain necessity; or if there be any other that have an equal reason with these, I have prevented already, by allowing them to be just and reasonable exceptions from the general rule, when they are real, and not made pretences to shake off our duty.

But there are, besides these, two objections, which indeed are real, but yet seem to have too great a weight with those who would fain decline this duty, and are by no means sufficient to excuse mothers, no not those of the highest rank and quality, from the natural obligation of it. And they are these: the manifest trouble, and the manifold restraints, which the careful discharge of this duty does unavoidably bring upon those who submit themselves to it.

1st, For the trouble of it, I have only this to say, and I think that no more need to be said about it—that nobody is discharged from any duty by reason of the trouble which necessarily attends it, and is inseparable from it; since God who made it a duty foresaw the trouble of it when he made it so.

2dly, As to the manifold restraints which it lays upon mothers; this will best be answered by considering of what nature these restraints are. And they are chiefly in these and the like instances: this duty restrains mothers from spending their morning and their money in curious and costly dressing; from mispending the rest of the day in formal and for the most part impertinent visits; and in seeing and hearing plays, many of which are neither fit to be seen or heard by modest persons and those who

pretend to religion and virtue; as I hope all Christians do, especially persons of higher rank and quality: and it restrains them likewise from trifling away a great part of the night in gaming, and in revelling till past midnight, I am loath to say how much.

These are those terrible restraints which this natural duty, of mothers nursing their children, lays upon them. Now I cannot but think all these to be very happy restraints: happy surely for the child, and in many respects happy for the father, and for the whole family, which by this means will be kept in much better order: but happiest of all for the mother, who does herein not only discharge a great and necessary duty, but is hereby also hindered from running into many great faults, which before they will be forgiven must cost her a deep contrition, and a very bitter repentance.

Perhaps I may have gone further in this unusual argument than will please the present age; but I hope posterity will be so wise as to consider it and lay it to heart. For I am greatly afraid that the world will never be much better till this great fault be mended. I proceed to the next particular wherein the good education of children doth consist; namely,

II. In bringing them to be baptized and admitted members of Christ's church, at the times appointed or accustomed in the national church, of which the parents are members. I mean, to bring them to the church to be there publicly initiated and solemnly admitted by baptism. And this the rules of the church of England do strictly enjoin, unless the child be in danger of death; and in that case only it is allowed to administer baptism privately, and in

a summary way, without performing the whole office: but then if the child live, it is ordered that it shall be brought to the church, where the remainder of the office is to be solemnly performed.

I know that of late years, since our unhappy confusions, this sacrament hath very frequently been administered in private; and ministers have been, in a manner, and to avoid the greater mischief of separation, necessitated to comply with the obstinacy of the greater and more powerful of their parishioners; who, for their ease, or humour, or for the convenience of a pompous christening, will either have their children baptized at home by their minister, or, if he refuse, will get some other minister to do it, which is very irregular.

Now I would entreat such persons calmly to consider how contrary to reason, and to the plain design of the institution of this sacrament, this perverse custom, and their obstinate resolution in it, is. For is there any civil society or corporation into which persons are admitted without some kind of solemnity? and is the privilege of being admitted members of the Christian church, and heirs of the great and glorious promises and blessings of the new covenant of the gospel, less considerable, and fit to be conferred with less solemnity? I speak to Christians; and they who are so in good earnest will, without my using more words about it, consider what I say in this particular.

III. Another and very necessary part of the good education of children is, by degrees to inform and carefully to instruct them in the whole compass of their duty to God, their neighbour, and themselves: that so they may be taught how to behave themselves in all the steps of their life, from their first

capacity of reason till they arrive at the more perfect use and exercise of that faculty; when, if at first they be well instructed, they will be better able to direct and govern themselves afterwards.

This duty God does expressly and very particularly charge upon his own peculiar people, the people of Israel, speaking of the laws which he had given them: "Thou shalt (says he) teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way; when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And this God long before promised, that Abraham, the father of the faithful, would do. "I know Abraham, (says he,) that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord."

Deut. vi. 7.

Gen. xviii. 19.

This work ought to be begun very early, upon the first budding and appearance of reason and understanding in children. So the prophet directs: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? Whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breast: for precept must be upon precept," &c.

Isa. xxviii. 9, 10.

To this end we must, by such degrees as they are capable, bring them acquainted with God and themselves: and, in the first place, we must inform them, that there is such a being as God, whom we ought to honour and reverence above all things. And then, we are all his creatures, and the work of his hands; that "it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves:" that he continually preserves us, and gives us all the good things that we enjoy: and therefore we ought to ask every thing of him by prayer, be-

cause this is an acknowledgment of our dependance upon him; and to return thanks to him for all that we have and hope for, because this is a just and easy tribute, and all that we can render to him for his numberless favours and benefits.

And, after this, they are to be instructed more particularly in their duty to God and men, as I shall shew more fully afterwards. And because fear and hope are the two passions which do chiefly sway and govern human nature, and the main springs and principles of action; therefore children are to be carefully informed, that there is a life after death, wherein men shall receive from God a mighty and eternal reward, or a terrible and endless punishment, according as they have done or neglected their duty in this life: that God will love and reward those who do his will and keep his commandments, but will execute a dreadful punishment upon the workers of iniquity and the wilful transgressors of his laws.

And, according as they are capable, they are to be made sensible of the great degeneracy and corruption of human nature, derived to us by the fall and wilful transgression of our first parents; and of the way of our recovery out of this miserable state by Jesus Christ: whom God hath sent in our nature to purchase and accomplish the redemption and salvation of mankind, from the captivity of sin and Satan, and from the damnation of hell.

IV. The good education of children consists, not only in forming their minds in the knowledge of God and their duty, but more especially in endeavouring with the greatest care and prudence to form their lives and manners to religion and virtue. And this must be done by training them up to the exercise of the following graces and virtues:—

First, To obedience and modesty; to diligence and sincerity; and to tenderness and pity, as the general dispositions to religion and virtue.

Secondly, To the good government of their passions, and of their tongue; and particularly to speak truth, and to hate lying as a base and vile quality; these being as it were the foundations of religion and virtue.

Thirdly, To piety and devotion towards God; to sobriety and chastity with regard to themselves; and to justice and charity towards all men; as the principal and essential parts of religion and virtue.

First, As the general dispositions to religion and virtue, we must train them up,

1st, To obedience. Parents must take great care to maintain their authority over their children; otherwise they will never regard their commands, nor hearken to and follow their instructions. If they once get head, and grow stubborn and disobedient, there is very little hope left of doing any great good upon them.

2dly, To modesty, which is a fear of shame and disgrace. This disposition, which is proper to children, is a marvellous advantage to all good purposes. "They are modest," says Aristotle, "who are afraid to offend; and they are afraid to offend who are most apt to do it:" as children are, because they are much under the power of their passions, without a proportionable strength of reason to govern them and keep them under.

Now modesty is not properly a virtue, but it is a very good sign of a tractable and towardly disposition, and a great preservative and security against sin and vice: and those children, who are much under the restraint of modesty, we look upon as most

hopeful and likely to prove good: whereas immodesty is a vicious temper broke loose and got free from all restraint: so that there is nothing left to keep an impudent person from sin, when fear of shame is gone: for sin will soon take possession of that person whom shame hath left. He that is once become shameless hath prostituted himself. Therefore preserve this disposition in children, as much as is possible, as one of the best means to preserve their innocency, and to bring them to goodness.

3dly, To diligence; *sine qua vir magnus nunquam extitit;* "without which, (says one,) there never was any great and excellent person." When the Roman historians describe an extraordinary man, this always enters into his character as an essential part of it, that he was *incredibili industriâ, diligentiâ singulari*, of *incredible industry*, of *singular diligence;* or something to that purpose. And indeed a person can neither be excellently good, nor extremely bad, without this quality. The devil himself could not be so bad and mischievous as he is, if he were not so stirring and restless a spirit, and did not "compass the earth and go to and fro seeking whom he may devour."

This is part of the character of Sylla, and Marius, and Catiline, those great disturbers of the Roman state; as well as of Cæsar and Pompey, who were much greater and better men, but yet gave trouble enough to their country, and at last dissolved the Roman commonwealth, by their ambition and contention for superiority: this, I say, enters into all their characters, that they were of a vigorous and indefatigable spirit. So that diligence in itself is neither a virtue nor a vice, but may be applied either way, to good or bad purposes, and yet, where all

other requisites do concur, it is a very proper instrument and disposition for virtue.

Therefore, train up children to diligence if ever you desire they should excel in any kind. "The diligent hand (saith Solomon) maketh rich;" rich in estate, rich in knowledge. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business," as the same wise man observes, "he shall stand before princes, he shall not stand before mean (or obscure) men." And again, "the hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be under tribute." Diligence puts almost every thing into our power, and will in time make children capable of the best and greatest things.

Prov. x. 4; xxii. 29.

Prov. xii. 24.

Whereas idleness is the bane and ruin of children; it is the unbending of their spirits, the rust of their faculties, and as it were the laying of their minds fallow; not as husbandmen do their lands, that they may get new heart and strength, but to impair and lose that which they have. Children that are bred up in laziness are almost necessarily bad, because they cannot take the pains to be good; and they cannot take pains, because they have never been inured and accustomed to it; which makes their spirits restive, and when you have occasion to quicken them and spur them up to business, they will stand stock still.

Therefore never let your children be without a calling, or without some useful, or at least innocent employment, that will take them up; that they may not be put upon a kind of necessity of being vicious for want of something better to do. The devil tempts the active and vigorous into his service, knowing what fit and proper instruments they are to do his drudgery: but the slothful and idle, nobody

having hired them and set them on work, lie in his way, and he stumbles upon them as he goes about; and they do as it were offer themselves to his service; and having nothing to do, they even tempt the devil himself to tempt them, and to take them in his way.

4thly, To sincerity; which is not so properly a single virtue, as the life and soul of all other graces and virtues: and without which, what show of goodness soever a man may make, he is unsound and rotten at the heart. Cherish therefore this disposition in children, as that which, when they come to be men, will be the great security and ornament of their lives, and will render them acceptable both to God and men.

5thly, To tenderness and pity: which when they come to engage in business and have dealings in the world, will be a good bar against injustice and oppression; and will be continually prompting us to charity, and will fetch powerful arguments for it from our own bowels.

To preserve this goodness and tenderness of nature, this so very human and useful affection, keep hildren, as much as is possible, out of the way of oloody sights and spectacles of cruelty; and discountenance in them all cruel and barbarous usage of creatures under their power; do not allow them to torture and to kill them for their sport and pleasure; because this will insensibly and by degrees harden their hearts, and make them less apt to compassionate the wants of the poor and the sufferings and afflictions of the miserable.

Secondly, As the main foundations of religion and virtue, children must be carefully trained up to the government of their passions, and of their tongues;

and particularly to speak truth, and to hate lying as a base and vile quality.

1st, To the good government of their passions. It is the disorder of these, more especially of desire, and fear, and anger, which betrays us to many evils. Anger prompts men to contention and murder: inordinate desire, to covetousness and fraud and oppression: and fear many times awes men into sin, and deters them from their duty.

Now if these passions be cherished, or even but let alone in children, they will in a short time grow headstrong and unruly, and when they come to be men will corrupt the judgment, and turn good-nature into humour, and the understanding into prejudice, and wilfulness: but if they be carefully observed and prudently restrained, they may by degrees be managed and brought under government; and the inordinacy of them being pruned away, they may prove excellent instruments of virtue.

Therefore be careful to discountenance in children any thing that looks like rage and furious anger, and to shew them the unreasonableness and deformity of it. Check their longing desires after things pleasant, and use them to frequent disappointments in that kind; that when you think fit to gratify them they may take it for a favour, and not challenge every thing they have a mind to as their due; and by degrees may learn to submit to the more prudent choice of their parents, as being much better able to judge what is good and fit for them.

And when you see them at any time apt out of fear to neglect their duty, or to fall into any sin, or to be tempted by telling a lie to commit one fault to hide and excuse another, which children are very apt to do; the best remedy of this evil will be to

plant a greater fear against a less, and to tell them what and whom they should chiefly fear—"not him who can hurt and kill the body, but Him who after he hath killed can destroy both body and soul in hell.

The neglect of children in this matter, I mean in not teaching them to govern their passions, is the true cause why many that have proved sincere Christians when they came to be men, have yet been very imperfect in their conversation, and their lives have been full of inequalities and breaches, which have not only been matter of great trouble and disquiet to themselves, but of great scandal to religion; when their light, which should shine before men, is so often darkened and obscured by these frequent and visible infirmities.

Secondly, To the government of their tongues. To this end teach children silence, especially in the presence of their betters. As soon as they are capable of such a lesson, let them be taught not to speak but upon consideration, both of what they say, and before whom. And above all, inculcate upon them that most necessary duty and virtue of speaking truth, as one of the best and strongest bands of human society and commerce: and possess them with the baseness and vileness of telling a lie: for if it be so great a provocation to give a man the lie, then surely to be guilty of that fault must be a mighty reproach.

They who write of Japan tell us, that those people, though mere heathens, take such an effectual course in the education of their children as to render a lie, and breach of faith, above all things odious to them: insomuch, that it is a very rare thing for any person among them to be taken in a lie, or found guilty of breach of faith. And cannot the

rules of Christianity be rendered as effectual to restrain men from these faults, which are scandalous even to nature, and much more so to the Christian religion?

To the government of the tongue does likewise belong the restraining of children from lewd and obscene words, from vain and profane talk, and especially from horrid oaths and imprecations: from all which they are easily kept at first, but if they are once accustomed to them, it will be found no such easy matter for them to get quit of these evil habits. It will require great attention and watchfulness over themselves, to keep oaths out of their common discourse: but if they be heated and in passion, they throw out oaths and curses as naturally as men that are highly provoked fling stones, or any thing that comes next to hand, at one another: so dangerous a thing is it to let any thing that is bad in children to grow up into a habit.

Thirdly, As the principal and essential parts of religion and virtue, let children be carefully bred up,

1st, To sobriety and temperance in regard to themselves; under which I comprehend likewise purity and chastity. The government of the sensual appetite, as to all kind of bodily pleasures, is not only a great part of religion, but an excellent instrument of it, and a necessary foundation of piety and justice. For he that cannot govern himself is not like to discharge his duty either to God or men. And therefore St. Paul puts sobriety first, as a primary and principal virtue, in which men are instructed by the Christian religion, and which must be laid as the foundation both of piety towards God, and of righteousness to men. "The grace of God," for so he calls the gospel, "that brings salvation unto all men, hath

appeared; teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world." It first teaches us to live soberly: and unless we train up children to this virtue, we must never expect that they will live righteously or godly in this present world.

Especially, children must be bred up to great sobriety and temperance in their diet, which will retrench the fuel of other inordinate appetites. It is a good saying I have met with somewhere, *Magna pars virtutis est bene moratus venter*, "a well-mannered and well-governed appetite," in matters of meats and drinks, "is a great part of virtue." I do do not mean, that children should be brought up according to the rules of a Lessian diet, which sets an equal stint to all stomachs; and it as senseless a thing as a law would be which should enjoin that shoes for all mankind should be made upon one and the same last.

2dly, To a serious and unaffected piety and devotion towards God, still and quiet, real and substantial, without much show and noise; and as free as may be from all tricks of superstition, or freaks of enthusiasm; which, if parents and teachers be not very prudent, will almost unavoidably insinuate themselves into the religion of children; and when they are grown up will make them appear, to wise and sober persons, fantastical and conceited; and render them very apt to impose their own foolish superstitions and wild conceits upon others, who understand religion much better than themselves.

Let them be taught to honour and love God above all things, to serve him in private, and to attend constantly upon his public worship, and to keep their

minds intent upon the several parts of it, without wandering and distraction; to pray to God as the fountain of all grace and the giver of every good and perfect gift; and to acknowledge him, and to render thanks to him, as our most gracious and constant benefactor, and the great patron and preserver of our lives; to be careful to do what he commands, and to avoid what he hath forbidden; to be always under a lively sense and apprehension of his pure and all-seeing eye, which beholds us in secret; and to do every thing in obedience to the authority of that great lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy, and with an awful regard to the strict and impartial judgment of the great day.

3dly, To justice and honesty: to defraud and oppress no man; to be as good as their word, and to perform all their promises and contracts; and endeavour to imprint upon their minds the equity of that great rule, which is so natural, and so easy, that even children are capable of it—I mean, that rule which our blessed Saviour tells us is the law and the prophets, namely, That we should do to others as we would have others do to us, if we were in their case and circumstances, and they in our's.

You that are parents and have to do in the world, ought to be just and equal in all your dealings. In the first place, for the sake of your own souls, and next for the sake of your children; not only that you may entail no curse upon the estate you leave them, but likewise that you may teach them no injustice by the example you set before them; which in this particular they will be as apt to imitate as in any one thing; because of the present worldly advantage which it seems to bring, and because justice is in truth a manly virtue, and least understood by

children; and therefore injustice is a vice which they will soonest practise, and with the least reluctancy, because they have the least knowledge of it in many particular cases: and because they have so little sense of this great virtue, they should not be allowed to cheat, no, not in play and sport, even when they play for little or nothing; for if they practise it in that case, and be unjust in a little, they will be much more tempted to be so when they can gain a great deal by it.

I remember that Xenophon in his Institution of Cyrus, which he designed for the idea of a well-educated prince, tells us this little but very instructive story concerning young Cyrus:—That his governor, the better to make him to understand the nature of justice, puts this case to him: "You see there," says he to Cyrus, "two boys playing, of different stature; the lesser of them hath a very long coat, and the bigger a very short one: now," says he, "if you were a judge, how would you dispose of these two garments?" Cyrus immediately, and with a very good reason as he thought, passeth this sudden sentence, "That the taller boy should have the longer garment, and he that was of lower stature the shorter, because this certainly was fittest for them both:" upon which his governor sharply rebukes him to this purpose; telling him, that if he were to make two coats for them he said well; but he did not put this case to him as a tailor, but as a judge, and as such he had given a wrong sentence: "For a judge," says he, "ought not to consider what is most fit, but what is just; not who could make the best use of a thing, but who hath the most right to it."

This I bring partly to shew in what familiar ways

the principles of virtue may be instilled into children; but chiefly to prove that justice is a manly virtue, and that there is nothing wherein children may be more easily misled, than in matters of right and wrong; therefore children should be taught the general principles and rules of justice and righteousness, because if we would teach them to do justice we must teach them to know what justice is. For many are unjust merely out of ignorance, and for want of knowing better, and cannot help it.

4thly, To charity; I mean chiefly to the poor and destitute; because this, as it is an essential, so it is a most substantial part of religion. Now to encourage this disposition in children we must not only give them the example of it, but must frequently inculcate upon them such passages of Scripture as these: "That pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction;" "That as we sow in this kind, so we shall reap;" "That he shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy:" that at the judgment of the great day we shall in a very particular manner be called to an account for the practice or omission of this duty, and shall then be absolved or condemned according as we have exercised or neglected this great virtue of the Christian religion.

SERMON LII.

OF THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.—PROV. xxii. 6.

V. THE good education of children consists in giving them good example. This course David took in his family, as appears by that solemn resolution of his, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Psal. ci. 2. Let parents and masters of families give good example to their children and servants, in a constant serving of God in their families, which will nourish religion in those that are under their care: and let them also be exemplary in a sober and holy conversation before those that belong to them.

And let not your children, as far as is possible, have any bad examples to converse with, either among your servants, or their own companions; lest by walking with them they learn their way and get a blot to their souls. There is a contagion in example, and nothing doth more slily insinuate itself and gain upon us than a living and familiar pattern; therefore, as much as in you lies, let children always have good examples before them.

Especially, let parents themselves be exemplary to them in the best things, because their example is of all other the most powerful, and carries greatest authority with it. And without this, instruction will signify

very little, and the great force and efficacy of it will be lost. We shall find it very hard to persuade our children to do that which they see we do not practise ourselves. For even children have so much sense and sagacity as to understand that actions are more real than words, and a more certain indication of what a man doth truly and inwardly believe. Example is the most lively way of teaching, and because children are much given to imitation, it is likewise a very delightful way of instruction, and that of which children are most capable; both because it is best understood, and is apt to make the deepest impressions upon them.

So that parents, above all others, have one argument to be religious and good themselves, for the sake of their children. If you desire to have them good, the best way to make them so is to give them the example of it in being good yourselves. For this reason parents should take great care to do nothing but what is worthy of imitation. Your children will follow you in what you do; therefore do not go before them in any thing that is evil. The evil example of parents is both a temptation and encouragement to children to sin, because it is a kind of authority for what they do, and looks like a justification of their wickedness.

With what reason canst thou expect that thy children should follow thy good instructions, when thou thyself givest them an ill example? Thou dost but as it were beckon to them with thy head, and shew them the way to heaven by thy good counsel, but thou takest them by the hand and leadest them in the way to hell by thy contrary example. Whenever you swear, or tell a lie, or are passionate and furious, or come drunk into your

family, you weaken the authority of your commands, and lose all reverence and obedience to them by contradicting your own precepts.

The precepts of a good man are apt to raise and inflame others to the imitation of them, but when they come from one who is faulty and vicious in that kind himself, they are languid and faint, and give us no heart and encouragement to the exercise of those virtues, which we plainly see they do not practise themselves. It is the apostle's argument: "Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Thou that teachest thy children to speak truth, dost thou tell a lie? Thou that sayest they must not swear, dost thou profane the name of God by customary oaths and curses? Thou art unfit to be a guide of the blind, a light to them that are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes, because thou thyself hast only a form of knowledge and of truth in the law, but art destitute of the life and practice of it.

In a word, if you be not careful to give good example to your children, you defeat your own counsels and undermine the best instructions you can give them; and they will all be spilt like water upon the barren sands, they will have no effect, they will bring forth no fruit.

VI. Good education consists in wise and early restraints from that which is evil, by seasonable reproof and correction. And this also is one way of instruction: so Solomon tells us, "the rod and reproof giveth wisdom:" and though both these do suppose a fault that is past, yet the great end of them is to prevent the like for the future, and to be an admonition to them for the time to come. And therefore whatever will proba- Prov. xxix. 15.

bly be effectual for future caution and amendment, ought to be sufficient in this kind, because the end is always to give measure to the means: and where a mild and gentle rebuke will do the business, reproof may stop there without proceeding farther; or when that will not do, if a sharp word and a severe admonition will be effectual, the rod may be spared.

Provided always that our lenity give no encouragement to sin, and be so managed that children may perceive that you are in good earnest, and resolved that if they will not reform they shall certainly be punished. And provided likewise, that your lenity bear a due proportion to the nature and quality of the fault. We must not use mildness in the case of a wilful and heinous sin, especially if it be exemplary and of public influence. To rebuke gently upon such an occasion is rather to countenance the fault, and seems to argue that we are not sensible enough of the enormity of it, and that we have not a due dislike and detestation for it: such cold reproofs as those which old Eli gave his sons, "Why do you such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people;" that is, their carriage was such as gave public scandal: "Nay, my sons; for it is not a good report that I hear, you make the Lord's people to transgress."

1 Sam. ii. 23, 24.

Such a cold reproof as this, where the crime was so great and notorious, was a kind of allowance of it, and a partaking with them in their sin; and so God interprets it, and therefore calls it, "a kicking at his sacrifice, and a despising of his offering." And he threatens Eli with most terrible judgments upon this very account,

1 Sam. ii. 29.

"because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

So that our severity must be proportioned to the crime. Where the fault is great, there greater severity must be used; so much at least as may be an effectual restraint for the future. Here was Eli's miscarriage, that in the case of so great a fault as his sons were guilty of, his proceeding was neither proportioned to the crime, nor to the end of reproof and correction, which is amendment for the future: but he used such a mildness in his reproof of them, as was more apt to encourage than restrain them in their vile courses: for so the text says, that "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

There are indeed some dispositions so very tender and tractable, that a gentle reproof will suffice. But most children are of that temper that correction must be sometimes used, and a fond indulgence in this case is many times their utter ruin and undoing; and in truth not love but hatred. So the wise man tells, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Prov. xiii. 24. "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." Chap. xix. 18. And again, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, and the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." Chap. xxii. 15. "Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." Chap. xxiii. 13, 14. Again, "The rod and reproof giveth wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame:" Chap. xxix. 15. he mentions the

mother emphatically, because she many times is most faulty in this fond indulgence; and therefore the shame and grief of it doth justly fall upon her.

So that correction is of great use, and often necessary; and parents that forbear, are not only cruel to their children, but to themselves: for God many times punished those parents very severely who have neglected this necessary piece of discipline. There is hardly to be found in the whole Bible a more terrible temporal threatening than that concerning Eli and his house, for his fond indulgence to his sons, who, when they came to be men, proved such horrible scandals not only to their father, but to the priest's office; and to that degree as to make the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred by all the people. I will recite the threatening at large for an admonition to parents that they be not guilty in this kind; 1 Sam. iii. 11—14. "The Lord said to Samuel, Behold I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle: in that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not: and therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." I know very well that this enormous wickedness of Eli's sons was committed by them after they were grown to be men, but this instance is nevertheless to my present purpose, there being hardly any doubt to be made, but that it was the natural effect of a remiss and too indulgent an education.

Yea very often God doth correct and remarkably punish fond parents by those very children who have wanted due reproof and correction: of which the Scripture gives us a remarkable instance in Adonijah, upon the mention of whose rebellion against David his father, the text takes particular notice of his father's extreme fondness of him, as both the procuring and meritorious cause of it: for his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, "Why hast thou done so?" And, on the contrary, the wise son of Sirach tells us, that "he that chastiseth his son shall have joy of him."

VII. The next thing I shall mention as a part of good education is, the bringing of children to be publicly catechised by the minister to prepare them for solemn confirmation.

It was with a particular respect to this work of public catechising, and by way of introduction to it, that I at first proposed to treat thus largely of the good education of children, hoping it might be of good use to handle this subject more fully than it hath usually been done, at least to my knowledge, from the pulpit.

And therefore I shall say something, and that very briefly, concerning the nature, and concerning the necessity and great usefulness of catechising children.

First, For the nature of it: it is a particular way of teaching by question and answer, accommodated and fitted for the instruction of children in the principles of religion. I do not indeed find, that this particular method is any where enjoined in Scripture; but instruction in general is: and I doubt not but that upon this general warrant parents and ministers may use that way of instruction of children

which is most fit and proper to instil into them the principles of religion. It is true, that the word κατηχεῖν, from whence our word catechism doth come, is used in Scripture to signify teaching in general: but it hath since by ecclesiastical writers been appropriated to that particular way of instruction which hath been long in use in the Christian church, and is commonly called catechising.

Secondly, As to the necessity and great usefulness of it; catechising hath a particular advantage as to children: because they are subject to forgetfulness, and want of attention. Now catechising is a good remedy against both these; because by questions put to them children are forced to take notice of what is taught, and must give some answer to the question that is asked: and a catechism being short, and containing in a little compass the most necessary principles of religion, it is the more easily remembered.

The great usefulness and indeed the necessity of it plainly appears by experience: for it very seldom happens, that children which have not been catechised have any clear and competent knowledge of the principles of religion; and for want of this are incapable of receiving any great benefit by sermons, which suppose persons to be in some measure instructed beforehand in the main principles of religion.

Besides, that if they have no principles of religion fixed in them, they become an easy prey to seducers. And we have had sad experience of this in our age; and among many other dismal effects of our late civil confusions this is none of the least, that public catechising was almost wholly disused, and private too in most families: for had catechising of children

been continued, it is very probable that this age would have been infested with fewer errors and with fewer schisms; and that there would not have been so much apostacy from the fundamentals of religion. For it is, I think, a true observation, that catechising, and the history of the martyrs, have been the two great pillars of the protestant religion.

There being then so great a necessity and usefulness of this way of instruction, I would earnestly recommend the practice of it to parents and masters of families with respect to their children and servants: for I do not think that this work should lie wholly upon ministers. You must do your part at home, who, by your constant residence in your families, have better and more easy opportunities of inculcating the principles of religion upon your children and servants. There you must prepare them for public catechising, that the work of the minister may not be too heavy upon him.

As to the part which concerns ministers, I intend, by God's assistance, so soon as the business can be put into a good method, to begin this exercise. And I do earnestly entreat all that have young children and servants, to bring such of them as are fit to be publicly catechised and instructed in the principles of religion: and I shall as often as shall be thought expedient spend some time in this work between afternoon prayers and sermon.

The catechism to be used shall be that appointed in our liturgy, which is short, and contains in it the chief principles of the Christian religion. And I shall make a short and plain explication of the heads of it, suitable to the capacity of children. And because this may not probably be of so great advantage to those who are of riper years and understandings,

yet because children are to be instructed as well as men, I must intreat those who are like to carry away the least profit, to bring with them the more patience: especially since I shall, for their sakes, in the constant course of my afternoon sermons, more largely and fully explain the chief principles of the Christian belief: a work, which you know I have some time ago entered upon.

VIII. The last thing I shall mention, and with which the state of childhood ends, is the bringing of children to the bishop, to be solemnly confirmed, by their taking upon themselves the vow which by their sureties they entered into at their baptism.

This is acknowledged by almost all sects and parties of Christians to be of primitive antiquity, and of very great use when it is performed with that due preparation of persons for it, by the ministers to whose charge they belong, and with that seriousness and solemnity which the nature of the thing doth require.

And to that end it were very desirable that confirmations should be more frequent, and in smaller numbers at a time; that so the bishop may apply himself more particularly to every person that is to be confirmed, that by this means the thing may make the deeper impression, and lay the stronger obligation upon them.

One thing more I could wish, both to prevent confusion, and for the ease also of the bishop, that his work may not be endless, that ministers would take care that none may present themselves to the bishop, or be presented by the ministers, to be confirmed a second time: because a great many are wont to offer themselves every time there is a confirmation, which is both very disorderly and un-

reasonable, there being every whit as little reason for a second confirmation, as there is for a second baptism: and if any persons need so often to be confirmed, it is a sign that confirmation hath very little effect upon them.

II. I proceed to the second general head, which was, to give some more particular directions for the management of this work of the good education of children in such a way as may be most effectual to its end.

First, Endeavour as well as you can, to discover the particular temper and disposition of children, that you may suit and apply yourselves to it, and by striking in with nature may steer and govern them in the sweetest and easiest way. This is like knowledge of the nature of the ground to be planted, which husbandmen are wont very carefully to inquire into, that they may apply the seed to the soil, and plant in it that which is most proper for it:

Quid quæque ferat regio, quid quæque recuset.
Hic segetes, illic veniunt felicius uvæ.

Every soil is not proper for all sorts of grain or fruit; one ground is fit for corn, another for vines. And so it is in the tempers and dispositions of children: some are more capable of one excellency and virtue than another, and some more strongly inclined to one vice than another: which is a great secret of nature and Providence, and it is very hard to give a just and satisfactory account of it.

It is good therefore to know the particular tempers of children, that we may accordingly apply our care to them, and manage them to the best advantage: that where we discern in them any forward inclina-

tions to good, we must cast in such seeds and principles, as, by their suitableness to their particular tempers, we judge most likely to take soonest and deepest root: and when these are grown up, and have taken possession of the soil, they will prepare it for the seeds of other virtues.

And so likewise when we discover in their nature a more particular disposition and leaning towards any thing which is bad, we must with great diligence and care apply such instructions, and plant such principles in them, as may be most effectual to alter this evil disposition of their minds; that whilst nature is tender and flexible, we may gently bend it the other way: and it is almost incredible, what strange things by prudence and patience may be done towards the rectifying of a very perverse and crooked disposition.

So that it is of very great use to observe and discover the particular tempers of children, that in all our instruction and management of them, we may apply ourselves to their nature and hit their peculiar disposition: by this means we may lead and draw them to their duty in human ways, and such as are much more agreeable to their temper than constraint and necessity, which are harsh and churlish, and against the grain. Whatever is done with delight goes on cheerfully; but when nature is compelled and forced, things proceed heavily: therefore, when we are forming and fashioning children to religion and virtue, we should make all the advantage we can of their particular tempers. This will be a good direction and help to us to conduct nature in the way it will most easily go. Every temper gives some particular advantage and handle whereby we may take hold of them and steer them more easily:

but if we take a contrary course we must expect to meet with great difficulty and reluctancy.

Such ways of education as are prudently fitted to the particular dispositions of children, are like wind and tide together, which will make the work go on amain: but those ways and methods which are applied cross to nature, are like wind against tide, which make a great stir and conflict, but a very slow progress. Not that I do, or can expect that all parents should be philosophers, but that they should use the best wisdom they have in a matter of so great concernment.

Secondly, In your instruction of children endeavour to plant in them those principles of religion and virtue which are most substantial, and are like to have the best influence upon the future government of their lives, and to be of continual and lasting use to them. Look to the seed you sow, that it be sound and good, and for the benefit and use of mankind: this is to be regarded, as well as the ground into which the seed is cast.

Labour to beget in children a right apprehension of those things which are most fundamental and necessary to the knowledge of God and our duty; and to make them sensible of the great evil and danger of sin; and to work in them a firm belief of the next life, and of the eternal rewards and recompences of it. And if these principles once take root, they will spread far and wide, and have a vast influence upon all their actions; and unless some powerful lust, or temptation to vice, hurry them away, they will probably accompany them and stick by them as long as they live.

Many parents, according to their best knowledge and apprehensions of religion, in which they them-

selves have been educated, and too often according to their zeal without knowledge, do take great care to plant little and ill-grounded opinions in the minds of their children, and to fashion them to a party, by infusing into them the particular notions and phrases of a sect, which, when they come to be examined, have no substance, nor perhaps sense in them: and by this means, instead of bringing them up in the true and solid principles of Christianity, they take a great deal of pains to instruct them in some doubtful doctrines of no great moment in religion, and perhaps false at the bottom; whereby, instead of teaching them to hate sin, they fix them in schism, and teach them to hate and damn all those who differ from them and are opposite to them; who yet are perhaps much more in the right, and far better Christians than themselves.

And indeed nothing is more common and more to be pitied, than to see with what a confident contempt and scornful pity some ill-instructed and ignorant people will lament the blindness and ignorance of those who have a thousand times more true knowledge and skill than themselves, not only in all other things, but even in the practice as well as knowledge of the Christian religion: believing those who do not relish their affected phrases and uncouth forms of speech to be ignorant of the mystery of the gospel, and utter strangers to the life and power of godliness.

But now what is the effect of this mistaken way of education? the harvest is just answerable to the husbandry.

Infelix lolium et steriles dominantur avenæ;

As they have sown, so they must expect to reap;

and instead of good grain to have cockle and tares: "they have sown the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind," as the expression is in the prophet; instead of true religion, and of a sober and peaceable conversation, there will come up new and wild opinions, a factious and uncharitable spirit, a furious and boisterous zeal, which will neither suffer themselves to be quiet, nor any body that is about them.

But if you desire to reap the effects of true piety and religion, you must take care to plant in children the main and substantial principles of Christianity, which may give them a general bias to holiness and goodness, and not to little particular opinions, which, being once fixed in them by the strong prejudice of education, will hardly ever be rooted out.

Thirdly, Do all that in you lies to check and discourage in them the first beginnings of sin and vice: so soon as ever they appear pluck them up by the roots. This is like the weeding of corn, which is a necessary piece of good husbandry. Vices like ill weeds grow apace, and if they once take to the soil, it will be hard to extirpate and kill them: but if we watch them and cut them up as soon as they appear, this will discourage the root and make it die.

Therefore take great heed that your children be not habituated and accustomed to any evil course. A vice that is of any considerable growth and continuance will soon grow obstinate; and, having once spread its root, it will be a very difficult matter to clear the ground of it. A child may be so long neglected, till he be overgrown with vice to that degree, that it may be out of the power of parents ever to bring him to good fruit. If it once gain upon the depraved disposition of children, it will be one of the hardest things in the world to give a stop to it. It is

the apostle's caution to "take heed of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin," which they who go on in an evil course will most certainly be. We should observe the first appearances of evil in children, and kill those young serpents as soon as they stir, lest they bite them to death.

Fourthly, Bring them, as soon as they are capable of it, to the public worship of God, where he hath promised his more especial presence and blessing. It is in Zion, the place of God's public worship, where "the Lord hath commanded the blessing, even life for evermore:" there are the means which God hath appointed for the begetting and increasing of grace in us: this is the pool where the angel useth to come and to "move the waters:" bring your children hither, where if they diligently attend they may meet with an opportunity of being healed.

And when they come from the church, call them frequently to an account of what they have heard and learned there: this will make them both to attend more diligently to what they hear, and to lay it up in their memories with greater care, and will fix it there so as to make a deeper and more lasting impression upon their minds.

Fifthly, Be careful more especially to put them upon the exercise and practice of religion and virtue, in such instances as their understanding and age are capable of. Teach them some short and proper forms of prayer to God, to be said by them devoutly upon their knees in private, at least every morning and evening. A great many children neglect this, not from any ill disposition of mind, but because nobody takes care to teach them how to do it. And if they were taught and put upon doing it, the habit and custom of any thing will, after a little while, make

that easy and delightful enough, which they cannot afterwards be brought to without great difficulty and reluctancy.

Knowledge and practice do mutually promote and help forward one another. Knowledge prepares and disposeth for practice, and practice is the best way to perfect knowledge in any kind. Mere speculation is a very raw and rude thing in comparison of that true and distinct knowledge which is gotten by practice and experience. The most exact skill in geography is nothing compared with the knowledge of that man, who, besides the speculative part, hath travelled over and carefully viewed the countries he hath read of. The most knowing man in the art and rules of navigation is nobody in comparison of an experienced pilot and seamen. Because knowledge perfected by practice is as much different from mere speculation, as the skill of doing a thing is from being told how a thing is to be done. For men may easily mistake rules, but frequent practice and experience are seldom deceived. Give me a man that constantly does a thing well, and that shall satisfy me that he knows how to do it. That saying of our blessed Saviour, "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself," is a clear determination of this matter, namely, that they understand the will of God best who are most careful to do it. And so likewise the best way to know what God is, is to transcribe his perfections in our lives and actions, to be holy, and just, and good, and merciful, as he is.

Therefore, when the minds of children are once thoroughly possessed with the true principles of religion, we should bend all our endeavours to put

them upon the practice of what they know: let them rather be taught to do well than to talk well; rather to avoid what is evil in all its shapes and appearances and to practise their duty in the several instances of it, than to speak with the tongues of men and angels: "Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." "Hereby, (saith St. John,) we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Job xxviii. 28.

1 John ii. 2—4.

Xenophon tells us, that the Persians, instead of making their children learned, taught them to be virtuous; and instead of filling their heads with fine speculations, taught them honesty, and sincerity, and resolution; and endeavoured to make them wise and valiant, just and temperate. Lycurgus also, in the institution of the Lacedemonian commonwealth, took no care about learning, but only about the lives and manners of their children: though I should think that the care of both is best, and that learning would very much help to form the manners of children, and to make them both wiser and better men: and therefore, with the leave of so great and wise a lawgiver, I cannot but think that this was a defect in his institution; because learning, if it be under the conduct of true wisdom and goodness, is not only an ornament but a great advantage to the better government of any kingdom or commonwealth.

Sixthly, There must be great care and diligence used in this whole business of education, and more particularly in the instruction of children. There

must be "line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little," as the prophet expresseth it. The principles of religion and virtue must be instilled and dropped into them by such degrees and in such a measure as they are capable of receiving them: for children are narrow-mouthed vessels, and a great deal cannot be poured into them at once. Isa. xxviii. 10.

And they must also be accustomed to the practice and exercise of religion and goodness by degrees, till holiness and virtue have taken root, and they be well settled and confirmed in a good course. Now this requires constant attendance, and even the patience of the husbandman, to wait for the fruit of our labours.

In some children the seeds that are sown fall into a greater depth of earth, and therefore are of a slow disclosure, and it may be a considerable time before they appear above ground; it is long before they shoot and grow up to any height, and yet they may afterwards be very considerable: which, as an ingenious author observes, should excite the care and prevent the despair of parents: for if their children be not such speedy spreaders and branchers as the vine, they may perhaps prove Sir H. W.

——*Proles tarde crescentis Olivæ.*

It is a work of great pains and difficulty to rectify a perverse disposition. It is more easy to palliate the corruption of nature, but the cure of it requires time and careful looking to. An evil temper and inclination may be covered and concealed, but it is a great work to conquer and subdue it. It must first be checked and stopped in its course, and then

weakened and the force of it be broken by degrees, and at last, if it be possible, destroyed and rooted out.

Seventhly and lastly, To all these means we must add our constant and earnest prayers to God for our children, that his grace may take an early possession of them; that he would give them virtuous inclinations and towardly dispositions for goodness, and that he would be pleased to accompany all our endeavours to that end with his powerful assistance and blessing; without which, all that we can do will prove ineffectual. Parents may plant, and ministers may water, but it is "God that must give the increase."

Be often then upon your knees for your children. Do not only teach them to pray for themselves, but do you likewise with great fervour and earnestness commend them to God, and to the power of his grace, which alone is able to sanctify them. Apply yourselves to "the Father of lights; from whom comes every good and perfect gift:" beg his Holy Spirit, and ask Divine knowledge and wisdom for them of Him, "who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth no man:" beseech him to season their tender years with his fear, which is the beginning of wisdom: pray for them as Abraham did for Ishmael,—"O that Ishmael may live in thy sight!"

Many parents, having found all their endeavours for a long time together ineffectual, have at length betook themselves to prayer, earnest and importunate prayer to God, as their last refuge. Monica, the mother of St. Austin, by the constancy and importunity of her prayers, obtained of God the conversion of her son, who proved afterwards so great and glorious an instrument of good to the church of God: according to what St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, to

encourage her to persevere in her fervent prayers for her son, had said to her, *Fieri non potest ut filius tot lacrymarum pereat:* "It cannot be," says he, "that a son of so many prayers and tears should miscarry." God's grace is free; but it is not unlikely that God will, at last, give in this blessing to our earnest prayers and faithful endeavours.

Therefore "pray for them without ceasing, pray and faint not." Great importunity in prayer seldom fails of a gracious answer: our blessed Saviour spake two parables on purpose to encourage us herein: not because God is moved, much less because he is tired out with our importunity; but because it is an argument of our firm belief and confidence in his great goodness: and "to them that believe, all things are possible," says our blessed Lord: to whom, &c.

SERMON LIII.

OF THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.—PROV. xxii. 6.

I PROCEED to the next general head which I proposed, namely,

III. To discover some of the more remarkable and common miscarriages in the management of this work. I do not hereby mean gross neglects for want of care, but mistakes and miscarriages for want of prudence and skill, even when there is no want of care and diligence in parents and instructors. And I shall, for method's sake, reduce the more considerable and common miscarriages to these three heads:

First, In matter of instruction.

Secondly, In matter of example.

Thirdly, In matter of reproof and correction.

First, In matter of instruction. Parents do very often mainly miscarry in not teaching their children the true difference between good and evil, and the degrees of them: as when we teach them any thing is a sin that really is not, or that any thing is not a sin which in truth is so: or when we teach them to lay more stress and weight upon things than they will bear; making that which perhaps is only convenient, to be in the highest degree necessary, or that which it may be is only inconvenient, or may be an occasion of scandal to some weak Christians, to be a sin in its own nature damnable.

Parents do likewise lay too great a weight upon things, when they are as diligent to instruct them in lesser things, and as strict in enjoining them, and as severe in punishing the commission or neglect of them, according as they esteem them good or evil, as if they were the weightier things of the law, and matters of the greatest moment in religion.

Thus I have known very careful and well-meaning parents, that have with great severity restrained their children in the wearing of their hair: nay, I can remember, since the wearing of it below their ears was looked upon as a sin of the first magnitude; and when ministers generally, whatever their text was, did in every sermon either find or make an occasion with great severity to reprove the great sin of long hair; and if they saw any one in the congregation guilty in that kind, they would point him out particularly, and let fly at him with great zeal.

I have likewise known some parents that have strictly forbidden their children the use of some sorts of recreations and games, under the notion of heinous sins, upon a mistake, that because there was in them a mixture of fortune and skill, they were therefore unlawful; a reason which I think hath no weight and force in it, though I do not deny but human laws may for very prudent reasons either restrain or forbid the use of these games, because of the boundless expense both of money and time which is many times occasioned by them.

I have known others, nay perhaps the same persons, that would not only allow but even encourage their children to despise the very service of God under some forms, which, according to their several apprehensions, they esteemed to be superstitious or factious. But this I have ever thought to be a thing

of most dangerous consequence, and have often observed it to end either in the neglect or contempt of all religion.

And how many parents teach their children doubtful opinions, and lay great stress upon them, as if they were saving or damning points; and hereby set such an edge and keenness upon them for or against some indifferent modes and circumstances of God's worship, as if the very being of a church and the essence of religion were concerned in them?

These certainly are great mistakes, and many times have very pernicious effects, thus to confound things which are of so wide and vast a difference as good and evil, lawful and unlawful, indifferent and necessary. For when children come to be men, and to have a freer and larger view of the world, and shall find, by the contrary practice of very wise and serious persons, that they have quite different apprehensions of these matters, and do not think that to be a sin which their parents have so strictly forbidden them under that notion, and many times punished them more severely for the doing of it than if they had told a lie—this may make them apt to question whether any thing be a sin: and the violences which they offer to their consciences, and the strain that they give them upon such an occasion, by complying with the general practice of others contrary to the principles of their education, doth many times open a gap for great and real sins.

Besides that, children which are bred up in high prejudices for or against indifferent opinions or practices in religion, do usually when they are grown up prove to be men of narrow and contracted spirits, peevish, and froward, and uncharitable, and many times great bigots and zealots either in the way of

superstition or faction, according to the principles which have been instilled into them to bias them either way. And very hardly do they ever quit themselves so clearly of their prejudices, as to become wise and peaceable and substantial Christians.

In short, if we carefully observe it, we shall find, that when children have been thus indiscreetly educated, their religion differs as much from that of sober and judicious Christians, as the civil behaviour and conversation of those who have been unskilfully and conceitedly taught how to carry themselves, does from the behaviour of those who have had a more free and generous education.

Secondly, In matter of example. There are many parents whose lives are exemplary in the main, who yet seem to use too great a freedom before their children. It is an old rule, and I think a very good one—

Maxima debetur pueris reverentia :

" There is a very great reverence due to children." There are many things which are not sins, and therefore may lawfully be done, which yet it may not be prudent and expedient to do before all persons. There are some words and actions so trivial and light, that they are not fit to be said or done before those for whom we have a reverence. There is a certain freedom of conversation, which is only proper among equals in age and quality, which if we use before our superiors and betters, we seem to contemn them; if before our inferiors, they will go nigh to contemn us.

It ought to be considered, that children do not understand the exact limits of good and evil ; so that if in our words or actions we go to the utmost bounds of that which is lawful, we shall be in danger of

shewing them the way to that which is unlawful. Children are not wont to be careful of their steps; and therefore we will not venture them to play about a precipice, or near a dangerous place, where yet men that will take care may go safely enough. And therefore parents should be very careful to keep their children from the confines of evil, and at as great a distance from it as they can. And to this end their words and actions should be ever tempered with gravity and circumspection, that children may not see or hear any thing which may acquaint them with the approaches to sin, or carry them to the borders of vice; lest they should not stop just there, but take a step further than you intended they should go.

Thirdly, In matter of reproof and correction. Many religious and careful parents are guilty of two great miscarriages in this part of education.

1. Of too much rigour and severity; which, especially with some sort of tempers, hath very ill success. The first experiment that should be made upon children should be to allure them to their duty, and by reasonable inducements to gain them to the love of goodness; by praise and reward, and sometimes by shame and disgrace: and if this will do, there will be no occasion to proceed to severity; especially not to great severities, which are very unsuitable to human nature. A mixture of prudent and seasonable reproof or correction when there is occasion for it, may do very well; but whips are not the cords of a man: human nature may be driven by them, but it must be led by sweeter and gentler ways.

Speusippus caused the pictures of joy and gladness to be set round about his school, to signify that the business of education ought to be rendered as

pleasant as may be: and indeed children stand in need of all the enticements and encouragements to learning and goodness. *Metus haud diuturni magister officii*, says Tully; Fear alone will not teach a man his duty, and hold him to it for any long time: for when that is removed, nature will break loose and do like itself. Besides that, frequent corrections make punishments to lose their awe and force, and are apt to spoil the disposition of children, and to harden them against shame; and after a while they will despise correction, when they find they can endure it.

Great severities do often work an effect quite contrary to that which was intended. And many times those who were bred up in a very severe school, hate learning ever after for the sake of the cruelty that was used to force it upon them: and so likewise an endeavour to bring children to piety and goodness by unreasonable strictness and rigour, does often beget in them a lasting disgust and prejudice against religion, and teaches them, as Erasmus says, *Virtutem simul odisse et nosse*, "to hate virtue at the same time that they teach them to know it;" for by this means virtue is represented to the minds of children under a great disadvantage, and good and evil are brought too near together: so that whenever they think of religion and virtue, they remember the severity which was wont to accompany the instructions about it; and the natural hatred which men have for punishment, is by this means derived upon religion itself. And indeed how can it be expected, that children should love their duty when they never hear of it but with a handful of rods shaked over them?

I insist upon this the more, because I do not re-

member to have observed more notorious instances of great miscarriage, than in the children of very strict and severe parents; of which I can give no other account but this—that nature when it is thus overcharged recoils the more terribly: it hath something in it like the spring of an engine, which being forcibly pressed, does upon the first liberty return back with so much the greater violence. In like manner the vicious dispositions of children, when restrained merely by the severity of parents, do break forth strangely as soon as ever they get loose and from under their discipline.

2. Another miscarriage in this matter is, when reproof and correction are accompanied and managed with passion. This is to betray one fault, and perhaps a greater, in the punishment of another. Besides that, this makes reproof and correction to look like revenge and hatred, which usually does not persuade and reform, but provoke and exasperate. And this probably may be one reason of the apostle's admonition—"Parents provoke not your children unto wrath;" because that is never likely to have any good effect. Correction is a kind of physic, which ought never to be administered in passion, but upon counsel and good advice.

And that passion is incident to parents upon this occasion, the apostle tells us, when he says, that "the parents of our flesh chasten us for their pleasure," that is, they do it many times to gratify their passion; but God chastens us "for our profit," not in anger, but with a design to do us good; and can we have a better pattern than our heavenly Father to imitate?

Heb. xii. 10.

A father is as it were a prince and a judge in his family: there he gives laws, and inflicts censures

and punishments upon offenders. But how misbecoming a thing would it be to see a judge pass sentence upon a man in choler? It is the same thing to see a father in the heat and fury of his passion correct his child. If a father could but see himself in this mood, and how ill his passion becomes him, instead of being angry with his child, he would be out of patience with himself. I proceed to the next thing I proposed; namely,

IV. To make out the truth of the proposition contained in the text, by shewing how the good education of children comes to be of so great advantage, and to have so good and lasting an influence upon their whole lives.

I confess there are some wild and savage natures, monstrous and prodigious tempers, hard as the rocks, and barren as the sand upon the sea shore; which discover strong and early propensions to vice, and a violent antipathy to goodness. Such tempers are next to desperate, but yet they are not utterly intractable to the grace of God, and the religious care of parents.

I hope such tempers as these are very rare, though God is pleased they should sometimes appear in the world, as instances of the great corruption and degeneracy of human nature, and of the great need of Divine grace. But surely there is no temper that is absolutely and irrecoverably prejudiced against that which is good. This would be so terrible an objection against the providence of God as would be very hard to be answered. God be thanked, most tempers are tractable to good education, and there is very great probability of the good success of it, if it be carefully and wisely managed.

And for the confirmation of this truth, I shall instance in two very great advantages of a religious and virtuous education of children.

1st, It gives religion and virtue the advantage of the first possession.

2dly, The advantage of habit and custom.

1st, Good education gives religion and virtue the advantage of the first possession. The mind of man is an active principle, and will be employed about something or other. It cannot stand idle, and will therefore take up with that which offers itself. So soon as reason puts forth itself, and the understanding begins to be exercised, the mind of man discovers a natural thirst after knowledge, and greedily drinks that which comes first. If it have not the waters of life and the pure streams of goodness to allay that thirst, it will seek to quench it in the filthy puddles and impure pleasures of this world.

Now since children will be busying their minds about something, it is good that they should be entertained with the best things, and with the best notions and principles of which their understanding and age are capable. It is a happy thing to be principled, and, as I may say, prejudiced the better way, and that religion should get the first possession of their hearts. For it is certainly a great advantage to religion to be planted in a tender and fresh soil. And if parents be careless and neglect this advantage, the enemy will be sure to sow his tares whilst the husbandman is asleep.

Therefore we should prevent the devil by giving God and goodness an early possession of our children, and by letting him into their hearts betimes. Possession is a great point, and it is of a mighty

consequence to have nature planted with good seeds before vicious inclinations spring up and grow into strength and habit.

I know that there is a spiteful proverb current in the world, and the devil hath taken care to spread it to the discouragement of an early piety—"A young saint and an old devil;" but notwithstanding this, a young saint is most likely to prove an old one. Solomon to be sure was of this mind, and I make no doubt but he made as wise and true proverbs as any body hath done since: Him only excepted, who was a much greater and wiser man than Solomon.

2dly, Good education gives likewise the advantage of habit and custom; and custom is of mighty force. It is, as Pliny in one of his Epistles says of it, *Efficacissimus omnium rerum magister*, "the most powerful and effectual master in every kind." It is an acquired and a sort of second nature, and next to nature itself a principle of greatest power. Custom bears a huge sway in all human actions; men love those things and do them with ease to which they have been long inured and accustomed. And, on the contrary, men go against custom with great regret and uneasiness.

And, among all others, that custom is most strong which is begun in childhood: and we see in experience the strange power of education in forming persons to religion and virtue. Now education is nothing but certain customs planted in childhood, and which have taken deep root whilst nature was tender.

We see likewise in common experience how dangerous an evil habit and custom is, and how hard to be altered. Therefore the Cretians, when

they would curse a man to purpose, wished that the gods would engage him in some bad custom, looking upon a man after that to be irrecoverably lost. So, on the other side, to be engaged in a good custom is an unspeakable advantage: especially for children to be habituated to a holy and virtuous course, before the habits of sin and vice have taken root and are confirmed in them.

We are too naturally inclined to that which is evil: but yet this ought not to discourage us, because it is certain in experience that a contrary custom hath done much in many cases, even where nature hath been strongly inclined the other way. Demosthenes did, by great resolution and almost infinite pains, and after a long habit, alter the natural imperfection of his speech, and even in despite of nature became the most eloquent man perhaps that ever lived. And this amounts even to a demonstration, for what hath been done may be done.

So that it is not universally true, which Aristotle says, That nature cannot be altered. It is true indeed in the instance which he gives of throwing a stone upward; "You cannot, (says he,) by any custom, nay, though you fling it up never so often, teach a stone to ascend of itself:" and so it is in many other instances in which nature is peremptory: but nature is not always so; but sometimes hath a great latitude. As we see in young trees, which though they naturally grow straight up, yet being gently bent may be made to grow any way. But, above all, moral inclinations and habits do admit of great alteration, and are subject to the power of a contrary custom.

Indeed children, when they come to be men, should take great care that they do not owe their religion only to custom; but they should, upon con-

sideration and due examination of the grounds of it, so far as they are capable of doing it, make it their choice. And yet, for all that, we must not deny the best religion in the world this greatest advantage of all other. It is certainly a great happiness for children to be inclined to that, which, when they come to understand themselves, they would make their choice, if they were indifferent: but an indifferency cannot be preserved in children: and therefore, since they will certainly be biassed one way or other, there is all the reason in the world why we should endeavour to bias them the better way. Parents may often mistake about what is best, but if they love their children they cannot but wish and endeavour that they may be good and do what is best.

I come now to the last head I proposed, which was,

V. To endeavour, by the most powerful arguments I can offer, to stir up and persuade those whose duty it is, to discharge it with great care and conscience.

If the foregoing discourse be true, what can be said to those who are guilty in the highest degree of the gross neglect of this great duty? who neither by instruction, nor example, nor restraint from evil, do endeavour to make their children good. Some parents are such monsters, I had almost said devils, as not to know how to give good things to their children; but instead of bread give them a stone, instead of fish give them a serpent, instead of an egg give them a scorpion—as our Saviour expresseth it.

These are evil indeed, who train up their children for ruin and destruction; in the service of the devil, and in the trade and mystery of iniquity: who, in-

stead of teaching them the fear of the Lord, infuse into them the principles of atheism, and irreligion, and profaneness: instead of teaching them to love and reverence religion, they teach them to hate and despise it, and to make a mock both of sin and holiness: instead of training them up in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, which are able to "make men wise unto salvation," they do *ædificare ad Gehennam*, "they edify them for hell," by teaching them to profane that holy book, and to abuse the word of God which they ought to tremble at, by turning it into jest and raillery: instead of teaching them to pray and to bless the name of God, they teach them to blaspheme that great and terrible name, and to profane it by their continual oaths and imprecations: and, instead of bringing them to God's church, they carry them to the devil's chapels, to playhouses and places of debauchery—those schools and nurseries of lewdness and vice.

Thus they, who ought to be the great teachers and examples of holiness and virtue, are the chief encouragers and patterns of vice and wickedness in their children; and instead of restraining them from evil, they countenance them in it, and check all forward inclinations to goodness; till at last they make them ten times more the children of wrath, than they were by that corrupt nature which they derived from them; and hereby treasure up, both for their children and themselves, "wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgments of God."

But I hope there are few or none such here. They do not use to frequent God's house and worship. And therefore I shall apply myself to those who are not so notoriously guilty in this kind, though they

are greatly faulty in neglecting the good education of their children. And for the greater conviction of such parents, I shall offer to them the following considerations.

First, Consider what a sad inheritance you have conveyed to your children. You have transmitted to them corrupt and depraved natures, evil and vicious inclinations: you have begotten them in your own image and likeness, so that by nature they are children of wrath. Now, methinks, parents that have a due sense of this should be very solicitous, by the best means they can use, to free them from that curse; by endeavouring to correct those perverse dispositions, and cursed inclinations, which they have transmitted to them. Surely you ought to do all you can to repair that broken estate which from you is descended upon them!

When a man hath by treason tainted his blood and forfeited his estate, with what grief and regret doth he look upon his children, and think of the injury he hath done to them by his fault? and how solicitous is he, before he die, to petition the king for favour to his children? how earnestly doth he charge his friends to be careful of them and kind to them? that by these means he may make the best reparation he can of their fortune which hath been ruined by his fault.

And have parents such a tenderness for their children, in reference to their estate and condition in this world; and have they none for the good estate of their souls and their eternal condition in another world? If you are sensible that their blood is tainted, and that their best fortunes are ruined by your sad misfortune; why do you not bestir yourselves for the repairing of God's image in them? Why do you

not travail in birth till Christ be formed in them? Why do you not pray earnestly to God, and give Him no rest, who hath reprieved, and, it may be, pardoned you, that he would extend his grace to them also, and grant them the blessings of his new covenant?

All your children are begotten of the bond-woman; therefore we should pray as Abraham did, "O that Ishmael may live in thy sight!" O that these sons of Hagar may be heirs of a blessing!

Secondly, Consider, in the next place, that good education is the very best inheritance that you can leave to your children. It is a wise saying of Solomon, that "wisdom is good with an inheritance;" but surely an inheritance without wisdom and virtue to manage it, is a very pernicious thing. And yet how many parents are there, who omit no care and industry to get an estate that they may leave it to their children, but use no means to form their minds and manners for the right use and enjoyment of it; without which it had been much happier for them to have been left in great poverty and straits?

Eccl. vii. 11.

Dost thou love thy child? this is true love to any one—to do the best for him we can. Of all your toil and labour for your children, this may be all the fruit they may reap, and all that they may live to enjoy—the advantage of a good education. All other things are uncertain. You may raise your children to honour, and settle a noble estate upon them to support it. You may leave them, as you think, to faithful guardians, and by kindness and obligation produce them many friends: and when you have done all this, their guardians may prove unfaithful and treacherous, and in the changes and revolutions of the world their honours may slip from under them,

and their riches "may take to themselves wings and fly away:" and when these are gone, and they come to be nipped with the frosts of adversity, their friends will fall off like leaves in autumn. "This is a sore evil," which yet "I have seen under the sun."

But if the good education of your children have made them wise and virtuous, you have provided an inheritance for them which is out of the reach of fortune, and cannot be taken from them. Crates the philosopher used to stand in the highest places of the city, and cry out to the inhabitants, "O ye people! why do ye toil to get estates for your children, when you take no care of their education?" This is, as Diogenes said, to take care of the shoe, but none of the foot that is to wear it; to take great pains for an estate for your children, but none at all to teach them how to use it; that is, to take great care to undo them, but none to make them happy.

Thirdly, Consider that, by a careful and religious education of your children, you provide for your own comfort and happiness. However they happen to prove, you will have the comfort of a good conscience and of having done your duty. If they be good they are matter of great comfort and joy to their parents. "A wise son (saith Solomon) maketh a glad father." It is a great satisfaction to see that which we have planted to thrive and grow up; to find the good effect of our care and industry, and that the work of our hands doth prosper. The son of Sirach, among several things for which he reckons a man happy, mentions this in the first place—"he that hath joy of his children." Ecclus. xxv. 7.

On the contrary, in wicked children the honour of a family fails, our name withers, and in the next generation will be quite blotted out: whereas a hopeful

posterity is a prospect of a kind of eternity. We cannot leave a better and more lasting monument of ourselves, than in wise and virtuous children. Buildings and books are but dead things in comparison of these living memorials of ourselves.

By the good education of children you provide for yourselves some of the best comforts both for this world and the other. For this world; and that at such a time when you most stand in need of comfort—I mean in the time of sickness and old age. Wise men have been wont to lay up some *præsidia Senectutis*, something to support them in that gloomy and melancholy time, as books and friends, or the like. But there is no such external comfort at such a time as good and dutiful children. They will then be the light of our eyes, and the cordial of our fainting spirits; and will recompense all our former care of them by their present care of us: and when we are decaying and withering away, we shall have the pleasure to see our youth as it were renewed, and ourselves flourishing again in our children. The son of Sirach speaking of the comfort which a good father hath in a well-educated son, "Though he die (says he) yet he is as if he were not dead, for he hath left one behind him that is like himself. While he lived he saw and rejoiced in him, and when he died he was not sorrowful."

Ecclus. xxx. 4, 5.

Whereas, on the contrary, "a foolish son is," as Solomon tells us, "a heaviness to his mother;" the miscarriage of a child being apt most tenderly to affect the mother. Such parents as neglect their children, do as it were provide so many pains and aches for themselves against they come to be old. And rebellious children are, to their infirm and aged

parents, so many aggravations of an evil day, so many burdens of their age: they help to bow them down and to bring their grey hairs so much the sooner with sorrow to their grave. They do usually repay their parents all the neglect of their education by their undutiful carriage towards them.

And good children will likewise be an unspeakable comfort to us in the other world. When we come to appear before God at the day of judgment, to be able to say to him, "Lo! here am I and the children which thou hast given me;" how will this comfort our hearts, and make us lift up our heads with joy in that day?

Fourthly, Consider that the surest foundation of the public welfare and happiness is laid in the good education of children: families are increased by children, and cities and nations are made up of families. And this is a matter of so great concernment both to religion and the civil happiness of a nation, that anciently the best constituted commonwealths did commit this care to the magistrate more than to parents.

When Antipater demanded of the Spartans fifty of their children for hostages, they offered rather to deliver to him twice as many men; so much did they value the loss of their country's education. But now amongst us this work lies chiefly upon parents. There are several ways of reforming men; by the laws of the civil magistrate, and by the public preaching of ministers. But the most likely and hopeful reformation of the world must begin with children. Wholesome laws and good sermons are but slow and late ways: the timely and the most compendious way is a good education. This may be an effectual prevention of evil; whereas all after ways are but re-

medies, which do always suppose some neglect and omission of timely care.

And because our laws leave so much to parents, our care should be so much the greater; and we should remember that we bring up our children for the public, and that, if they live to be men, as they come out of our hands they will prove a public happiness or mischief to the age. So that we can no way better deserve of mankind, and be greater benefactors to the world, than by peopling it with a righteous offspring. Good children are the hopes of posterity, and we cannot leave the world a better legacy than well-disciplined children. This gives the world the best security that religion will be propagated to posterity, and that the generations to come shall know God, and the children that are to be born shall fear the Lord

This was the great glory of Abraham, next to his being the "friend of God," that he was the "father of the faithful." And the careful education of children, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is so honourable to parents, that God himself would not pass it by in Abraham without special mention of it to his everlasting commendation: "I know Abraham, (says God,) that he will command his children, and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment."

Gen. xviii. 19.

Fifthly, Consider yet further the great evils consequent upon this neglect. And they are manifold. But not to enlarge particularly upon them, they all end in this, the final miscarriage and ruin of children. Do but leave depraved corrupt nature to itself, and it will take its own course, and the end of it in all probability will be miserable.

If the generous seeds of religion and virtue be not carefully sown in the tender minds of children, and those seeds be not cultivated by good education, there will certainly spring up briars and thorns, of which parents will not only feel the inconveniences, but every body else that comes near them.

Neglectis urenda filix innascitur Agris.

If the ground be not planted with something that is good, it will bring forth that which is either useless or hurtful, or both; for nature is seldom barren, it will either bring forth useful plants, or weeds.

We are naturally inclined to evil, and the neglect of education puts children upon a kind of necessity of becoming what they are naturally inclined to be. Do but let them alone, and they will soon be habituated to sin and vice. And when they are once accustomed to do evil, they have lost their liberty and choice: they are then hardly capable of good counsel and instruction; or, if they be patient to hear it, they have no power to follow it, being bound in the chains of their sins, and led captive by Satan at his pleasure. And when they have brought themselves into this condition, their ruin seems to be sealed; and without a miracle of God's grace, they are never to be reclaimed.

Nor doth the mischief of this neglect end here; but it extends itself to the public, and to posterity. If we neglect the good education of our children, they will in all probability prove bad men; and these will neglect their children; and so the foundation of an endless mischief is laid, and our posterity will be bad members both of church and commonwealth.

If they be neglected in matter of instruction, they will either be ignorant or erroneous; either they will not mind religion, or they will disturb the church with new and wild opinions: and I fear, that the neglect of instructing and catechising youth, of which this age hath been so grossly guilty, hath made it so fruitful of errors and strange opinions.

But if, besides this, no care be taken of their lives and manners, they will become burdens of the earth, and pests of human society, and so much poison and infection let abroad into the world.

Sixthly and lastly, Parents should often consider, that the neglect of this duty will not only involve them in the inconvenience, and shame, and sorrow, of their children's miscarriage, but in a great measure in the guilt of it: they will have a great share in all the evil they do, and be in some sort chargeable with all the sins they commit. If the children bring forth wild and sour grapes, the parents' teeth will be set on edge.

The temporal mischiefs and inconveniences which come from the careless education of children, as to credit, health, and estate, all which do usually suffer by the vicious and lewd courses of your children; these methinks should awaken your care and diligence: but what is this to the guilt which will redound to you upon their account? part of all their wickedness will be put upon your score; and possibly the sins which they commit many years after you are dead and gone, will follow you into the other world, and bring new fuel to hell, to heat that furnace hotter upon you.

However, this is certain, that parents must one day be accountable for all their neglects of their children: and so likewise shall ministers and masters

of families for their people and servants, so far as they had the charge of them.

And what will parents be able to say to God at the day of judgment for all their neglects of their children, in matter of instruction, and example, and restraint from evil? How will it make your ears tingle, when God shall arise terribly to judgment, and say to you, "Behold! the children which I have given you; they were ignorant, and you instructed them not; they made themselves vile, and you restrained them not: why did not you teach them at home, and bring them to church to the public ordinances and worship of God, and train them up to the exercise of piety and devotion? But you did not only neglect to give them good instruction, but you gave them bad example: and lo! they have followed you to hell, to be an addition to your torment there.

"Unnatural wretches! that have thus neglected, and by your neglect destroyed those, whose happiness by so many bonds of duty and affection you were obliged to procure: behold! the books are now open, and there is not one prayer upon record that ever you put up for your children: there is no memorial, no not so much as of one hour that ever was seriously spent to train them up to a sense of God, and to the knowledge of their duty. But on the contrary it appears that you have many ways contrived their misery, and contributed to their ruin, and helped forward their damnation. How could you be thus unnatural? How could you thus hate your own flesh, and hate your own souls? How much better had it been for them, and how much better for you, that they had never been born?"

Would not such a heavy charge as this make every joint of you to tremble? will it not cut you to the heart, and pierce your very souls, to have your children challenge you in that day, and say to you one by one, "Had you been as careful to teach me the good knowledge of the Lord, as I was capable of learning it; had you been but as forward to instruct me in my duty, as I was ready to have hearkened to it, it had not been with me as it is at this day; I had not now stood trembling here in a fearful expectation of the eternal doom which is just ready to be passed upon me. Cursed be the man that begat me, and the paps that gave me suck. It is to you that I must in a great measure owe my everlasting undoing." Would it not strike any of us with horror to be thus challenged and reproached by our children in "that great and terrible day of the Lord?"

I am not able to make so dreadful a representation of this matter as it deserves. But I would by all this, if it be possible, awaken parents to a sense of their duty, and terrify them out of this gross and shameful neglect which so many are guilty of. For when I seriously consider how supinely remiss and unconcerned many parents are as to the religious education of their children, I cannot but think of that saying of Augustus concerning Herod, "Better be his dog than his child:" I think it was spoken to another purpose, but it is true likewise to the purpose I am speaking of—better to be some men's dogs, or hawks, or horses, than their children: for they take a greater care to breed and train up these to their several ends and uses, than to breed up their children for eternal happiness.

Upon all these accounts, "Train up a child in the

way he should go, that when he is old he may not depart from it:" that neither your children may be miserable by your fault, nor you by the neglect of so natural and necessary a duty towards them. God grant that all that are concerned may lay these things seriously to heart, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON LIV.

[Preached in the Church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, in the year 1662.]

OF THE ADVANTAGES OF AN EARLY PIETY.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.—ECCLES. xii. 1.

IN the former discourses, concerning the education of children, I have carried the argument through the state of childhood to the beginning of the next step of their age, which we call youth; when they come to exercise their reason, and to be fit to take upon themselves the performance of that solemn vow which was made for them by their sureties in baptism.

To encourage them to set seriously and in good earnest about this work, I shall now add another discourse, concerning the advantages of an early piety. And to this purpose I have chosen for the foundation of it these words of Solomon, in his book called Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

It will not be necessary to give an account of the context any further than to tell you, that this book of the royal preacher is a lively description of the vanity of the world in general, and particularly of the life of man. This is the main body of his ser-

mon, in which there are here and there scattered many serious reflections upon ourselves, and very weighty considerations, to quicken our preparations for our latter end, and to put us in mind of "the days of darkness, which will be many," as the preacher tells us in the chapter before the text.

Among these is the admonition and advice in the words of the text: which do indeed concern those that are young, but yet will afford useful matter of meditation to persons of all ages and conditions whatsoever: of great thankfulness to Almighty God from those, who, by the grace of God, and his blessing upon a pious education, have entered upon a religious course betimes; and of a deep sorrow and repentance to those who have neglected and let slip this best opportunity of their lives; and of taking up a firm resolution of redeeming that loss, as much as is possible, by their future care and diligence: and to them more especially, who are grown old and have not yet begun this great and necessary work, it will minister occasion to resolve upon a speedy retreat, and without any further delay to return to God and their duty; lest the opportunity of doing it, which is now almost quite spent, be lost for ever.

The text contains a duty, which is to "remember our Creator;" and a limitation of it more especially to one particular age and time of our life—"in the days of our youth:" not to exclude any other age, but to lay a particular emphasis and weight upon this: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth;" that is, more especially in this age of thy life: to intimate to us, both that this is the fittest season, and that we cannot begin this work too soon.

And this is further illustrated by the opposition of it to old age—"when the evil days come not, nor the

years draw nigh, of which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." This is a description of old age, the evils whereof are continually growing; and which, in respect of the cares and griefs, the distempers and infirmities, which usually attend it, is rather a burden than a pleasure.

In the handling of these words, I shall do these three things:—

First, I shall consider the nature of the act or duty here enjoined; and that is, to remember God.

Secondly, I shall consider what there is in the notion of God as Creator which is more particularly apt to awaken and oblige us to the remembrance of him.

Thirdly, I shall consider the limitation of this duty more especially to this particular age of our lives—the days of our youth: why we should begin this work then, and not put it off to the time of old age.

I. I shall consider the nature of the act or duty here enjoined; which is, to remember our Creator. For the understanding of which expression, and others of the like nature in Scripture, it is to be considered, that it is very usual in Scripture to express religion and the whole duty of man by some eminent act or principle, or part of religion: sometimes by the knowledge of God, and by faith in him; and very frequently by the fear and by the love of God; because these are the great principles and parts of religion: and so likewise, though not so frequently, religion is expressed by the remembrance of God. Now remembrance is the actual thought of what we do habitually know. To remember God, is to have him actually in our minds, and upon all proper occasions to revive the thoughts

of him, and, as David expresseth it, to set him always before us: "I set the Lord, (says he) always before me;" that is, God was continually present to his mind and thoughts.

And in opposition to this we find wicked men in Scripture described by the contrary quality—forgetfulness of God: so they are described in Job; "Such are the paths of them that forget God;" that is, of the wicked: and the same description David gives of them. "The wicked (says he) shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God:" and elsewhere he gives the same character of a wicked man, that "God is not in all his thoughts."

Job viii. 13.

Psalm ix. 17.

Psalm x. 4.

And the course of a religious life is not unfitly expressed by our remembrance of God. For to remember a person or thing is to call them to mind upon all proper and fitting occasions; to think actually of them, so as to do that which the remembrance of them does require, or prompt us to. To remember a friend, is to be ready upon occasion to do him all good offices: to remember a kindness and benefit, is to be ready to acknowledge and requite it when there is an opportunity: to remember an injury, is to be ready to revenge it: and, in a word, to remember any thing is to be mindful to do that which the memory of such a thing doth naturally suggest to us.

So that to remember God, is frequently, and in our most serious and retired thoughts, to consider that there is such a being as God is; of all power and perfection, who made us and all other things, and hath given us laws to live by, suitable to our natures; and will call us to a strict account for our

observance or violation of them, and accordingly reward or punish us; very often in this world, and to be sure in the other.

It is to revive often in our minds the thoughts of God and of his infinite perfections, and to live continually under the power and awe of these apprehensions—that he is infinitely wise and good, holy and just; that he is always present with us, and observes what we do, and is intimate to our most secret thoughts, and "will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;" as the preacher tells us in the conclusion of this sermon.

The duty then here required of us, is, so soon as we arrive at the use of reason and the exercise of our understandings, to take God into consideration, and to begin a religious course of life betimes: to consecrate the beginning of our days and the flower and strength of them to his service: whilst our mind is yet soft and tender, and in a great measure free from all other impressions, to be mindful of the Being that is above us; and in all our designs and actions to take God into consideration, and to do every thing in his fear, and with an eye to his glory. "Remember thy Creator," that is, honour, fear, love, obey, and serve him; and, in a word, do every thing as becomes one that is mindful of God, and hath him continually in his thoughts.

II. I shall in the next place consider, what there is in the notion of God as our Creator that is more particularly apt to awaken and oblige men to the remembrance of God. The text does not barely require us to remember God, but to remember him as the author and founder of our beings; "Remember thy Creator." And there is certainly some particular emphasis in it;

so that God, considered under the notion of our Creator, is apt to strike us with a particular regard and awe of him. And that upon a threefold account; as creation is a sensible demonstration to us, 1st, Of the being; 2dly, Of the power; and 3dly, Of the goodness of God.

First, Of his being. The creation is of all other the most sensible and obvious argument of a Deity. Other considerations may work upon our reason and understanding, but this doth as it were bring God down to our senses. So often as we look up to heaven, or down upon the earth; upon ourselves, or into ourselves; upon the things without us, and round about us; which way soever we turn our eyes, we are encountered with plain evidences of a superior Being, which made us and all other things; every thing which we behold with our eyes doth, in some way or other, represent God to us, and bring him to our minds, so as we cannot avoid the sight of him, if we would. So the psalmist tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shews the work of his hands." Psalm xix. 1. And so likewise St. Paul; "The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made; even his eternal power and Godhead." Rom. i. 20.

Secondly, As the creation is a demonstration of God's infinite power. And this consideration is apt to work upon our fear, the most wakeful passion of all other in the soul of man: insomuch, that the atheist would fain ascribe the original apprehension and belief of a Deity to the natural fears of men; *Primus in orbe Deos fecit timor*, "Fear first made gods;" and by this means would fain persuade us, that it is so far from being true that God is our

Creator, that he is merely the creature of our own vain fear and imagination.

But surely this is very unreasonable. For if there be a God that made us, there is infinite reason why we should stand in awe of him, and have him always in our mind and thoughts; because he who made us and all other things, if we neglect him and forget so great a benefactor, can as easily make us miserable, or turn us out of being. Therefore "remember thy Creator," and despise or forget him at thy utmost peril.

Thirdly, As the creation is a demonstration of the goodness of God to his creatures. This consideration of God, as our Creator, doth naturally suggest to our minds, that his goodness brought us into being; and that if being be a benefit, God is the fountain and author of it; that his goodness called us out of nothing, and made us to be what we are; for of his good pleasure we are and were created. He was under no necessity of doing it; for he was from eternal ages happy in himself before we were, and would have been so to all eternity though we had never been; nor was it possible he could be under any obligation to us before we were.

And he is not only our Creator as he gave us our beings at first, but likewise as we are preserved and continued in life by the same goodness which first gave us life and breath; for of his goodness we *are* as well as were created.

And can we forget so great a benefactor, and be unmindful of the God that formed us? Can we choose but remember the founder of our beings, the great patron and preserver of our lives; and so soon as we arrive at the use of reason, and discover this great benefactor to whom we owe our lives and all the blessings of them, can we forbear to do

homage to him, and to say with David, "O come, let us worship and fall down and kneel before the Lord our Maker: for he is the Lord our God, it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." I proceed to consider, in the

III. Third and last place, The reason of the limitation of this duty more especially to this particular age of our lives, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, when the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them:" "Now, in the days of thy youth;" by which Solomon plainly designs two things.

First, To engage young persons to begin this great and necessary work of religion betimes, and as soon as ever they are capable of taking it into consideration: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." And the son of Sirach, much to the same purpose, speaking of one that in good earnest applies his heart to wisdom, describes him in this manner, "He will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him;" which is the same with the expression in the text, of "remembering our Creator in the days of our youth."

Secondly, To engage young persons to set about this work presently, and not to defer it and put it off to the future, as most are apt to do; "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth:" especially, not to adjourn it to the most unfit and improper time of all other—to the time of infirmity and old age; "now in the days of thy youth; when the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them: while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened," &c.

And how much reason there is to press both these

considerations upon young persons, I shall endeavour to shew in the following particulars.

First, Because in this age of our lives we have the greatest and most sensible obligation to remember God our Creator: "in the days of our youth," when the blessing and benefit of life is new, and the memory of it fresh upon our minds. It ought not indeed to be so, but we find it true which Seneca says, *Nihil citius senescit quam gratia*; "Nothing sooner grows old and out of date than obligation;" and we are but too apt to forget what we have the greatest reason to remember.

In this age of our life, when we begin to come to the free use and exercise of our reason, the first thing we are instructed in, and if we were not taught it we should, though perhaps more slowly, discover and find it out of ourselves; I say, the first thing we are instructed in, and inquisitive about, is the Author of our beings, and how we came into the world: and when God first appears to our minds, and we come by degrees clearly to understand by whose bounty and blessing it is that we are and have been preserved thus long, without our own care; principally by the providence of God, and under him by those instruments which he hath raised and preserved for that purpose; when we consider this, we cannot but be strangely surprised both with the novelty of the benefit and the greatness of it.

And when we have well viewed ourselves, and looked about us upon the creatures below us, all of them subject to our dominion and use: and when we consider seriously in what a noble rank and order of creatures we are placed; and how fearfully and wonderfully we are made, not grovelling upon the earth or bowed down to it, but of a beautiful

and upright shape of body, and such a majesty of countenance as if we were all kings of the creation: and which is much more excellent than this, that we are endued with minds and understandings, with reason and speech, whereby we are capable not only of conversing with and benefiting one another, but also of the knowledge and friendship and enjoyment of the best and most perfect of beings, God himself: I say, when we first consider this, and meditate seriously upon it, can we possibly ever after forget God? shall we not naturally break out into that inquiry, which Elihu thinks so proper for man, that he wonders it is not in every man's mouth: "Where is God my Maker, who teacheth me more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh me wiser than the fowls of heaven." Job xxxv. 10, 11.

So that there is a very special obligation upon us to be mindful of God in this age of our lives when we first come to the knowledge of him, and when the sense of his favours are fresh and new to us; and, not only so, but when the blessing of life is at the very best, and in its verdure and flower; when our health is in its strength and vigour, and the pleasures and enjoyments of life have their full taste and perfect relish. So Job describes the days of his youth: "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in the days of my youth," &c. Ch. xxix. 2, 3, 4.

Indeed, when the evil days are once come, and thou art entered upon the years in which thou thyself hast no pleasure, there might be some sort of pretence then to forget God: because then life begins to wither and decay, and not only the gloss

and beauty, but even the comfort and sweetness of it are gone, and it becomes an insipid and tasteless thing: but thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever thou art, if thou art unmindful of God in the best age of thy life, and when the sense of his benefits ought upon all accounts to make the strongest and deepest impressions upon thy mind.

Secondly, The reason will be yet stronger to put us upon this, if we consider that, notwithstanding the great obligation which lies upon us to "remember our Creator in the days of our youth," we are most apt at that time of all other to forget him. For that which is the great blessing of youth is also the great danger of it, I mean, the health and prosperity of it; and, though men have then least reason, yet they are most apt to forget God in the height of pleasure and in the abundance of all things.

Youth is extremely addicted to pleasure, because it is most capable and sensible of it; and where we are most apt to be transported, there we are most apt to transgress. Nothing does so besot the mind and extinguish in it all sense of Divine things as sensual pleasures. If we fall in love with them, they will take off our thoughts from religion, and steal away our hearts from God. For "no man can serve two masters; and the carnal mind is enmity against God."

Besides that youth is rash and inconsiderate, because unexperienced; and consequently not apt to be cautious and prudent, no not as to the future concernments of this temporal life; much less of that which seems to be at so much greater distance, and for that reason is so very seldom in our thoughts.

Thirdly, Because this age is of all other the fittest and best to begin a religious course of life. And

this does not contradict the former argument, though it seems to do so. For as it is true of children, that they are most prone to be idle, and yet fittest to learn: so in the case we are speaking of both are true; that youth is an age wherein we are too apt, if left to ourselves, to forget God and religion, and yet at the same time fittest to receive the impressions of it.

Youth is *ætas disciplinæ*, the proper age of discipline; very obsequious and tractable, fit to receive any kind of impression and imbibe any tincture: now we should lay hold of this golden opportunity. This age of suppleness, and obedience, and patience for labour, should be plied by parents, before that rigour and stiffness, which grows with years, comes on too fast. Childhood and youth are choice seasons for the planting of religion and virtue; and, if parents and teachers sleep in this seed time, they are ill husbandmen; for this is the time for ploughing and sowing.

This age is certainly the most proper for instruction, according to that of the prophet: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? Whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breast. For precept must be upon precept, and line upon line, here a little and there a little." And the sooner this is done the better, only things must be instilled into them gently and by degrees. Isa. xxviii. 9.

It is a noted saying of Aristotle, that "young persons are not fit to hear lectures of moral philosophy;" because at that age passion is so predominant and unruly: by which, I think he only means that the minds of young persons are least prepared to receive the precepts of morality and to submit to

them; but that he does not hereby intend, that therefore no care ought to be used to form the minds and manners of youth to virtue and goodness. He certainly understood the nature and power of evil habits too well to be of that mind; and consequently must think, that the principles of morality ought with great care and diligence to be instilled into young persons betimes: because they of all other have the most need of this kind of instruction, and this age is the most proper season for it; and the less their minds are prepared for it, so much the more pains ought to be taken with them, that they may be taught to govern and subdue their passions before they grow too stiff and headstrong. So that, if the seeds of religion and virtue be not planted in our younger years, what is to be expected in old age? According to that of the son of Sirach, "If thou hast gathered nothing in thy youth, how canst thou expect to find any thing in thine age?"

Ecclus. xxv. 3.

Young years are tender and easily wrought upon, apt to be moulded into any fashion; they are *udum et molle lutum*, like moist and soft clay, which is pliable to any form; but soon grows hard, and then nothing is to be made of it. It is a very difficult thing to make impressions upon age, and to deface the evil which hath been deeply imprinted upon young and tender minds. When good instruction hath been neglected at first, a conceited ignorance doth commonly take possession, and obstruct all the passages through which knowledge and wisdom should enter into us.

Upon this consideration the work of religion should be begun betimes, because it is a mighty advantage to any thing to be planted in a ground that

is newly broken up. It is just the same thing for young persons to be entered into a religious course and to have their minds habituated to virtue before vicious customs have got place and strength in us: for whoever shall attempt this afterwards will meet with infinite difficulty and opposition, and must dispute his ground by inches.

It is good therefore to do that, which must be done one time or other, when it is easiest to be done; when we may do it with the greatest advantage, and are likely to meet with the least and weakest opposition. We should anticipate vice, and prevent the devil and the world, by letting God into our hearts betimes, and giving religion the first *seisin* and possession of our souls. This is the time of sowing our seed, which must by no means be neglected. For the soul will not lie fallow; good or evil will come up. If our minds be not cultivated by religion, sin and vice will get the possession of them: but if our tender years be seasoned with the knowledge and fear of God, this in all probability will have a good influence upon the following course of our lives.

In a word, this age of our lives is proper for labour and conflict; because youth is full of heat and vigour, of courage and resolution to enterprise and effect difficult things. This heat indeed renders young persons very unfit to advise and direct themselves, and therefore they have need to be advised and directed by those who are wiser and more experienced: but yet this heat makes them very fit for practice and action; for though they are bad at counsel, they are admirable at execution, when their heat is well directed; they have a great deal of vivacity and quickness, of courage and constancy, in the way wherein they are set.

Besides that, youth hath a great sense of honour and virtue, of praise and commendation, which are of great force to engage young persons to attempt worthy and excellent things. For hope and confidence, strength and courage, with which a sense of honour and desire of praise are apt to inspire them, are admirable instruments of victory and mastery in any kind; and these are proper and most peculiar to youth. "I write unto you, young men (saith St. John), because ye are strong, and have overcome the evil one."

And, besides the spirit and vigour of youth, young persons have several other qualities which make them very capable of learning any thing that is good. They are apt to believe, because they have not been often deceived; and this is a very good quality in a learner. And they are full of hopes, which will encourage them to attempt things even beyond their strength; because hope is always of the future, and the life of young persons is in a great measure before them and yet to come. And, which is a good bridle to restrain them from that which is evil, they are commonly very modest and bashful: and which is also a singular advantage, they are more apt to do that which is honest and commendable than that which is gainful and profitable, being in a great measure free from the love of money, which experience, as well as the apostle, tells us, "is the root of all evil." Children are very seldom covetous, because they have seldom been bitten by want.

Fourthly, This is the most acceptable time of all other, because it is the first of our age. Under the law the first-fruits and the first-born were God's. In like manner we should devote the first of our age and time to Him. God is the first and most ex-

cellent of beings, and therefore it is fit that the prime of our age and the excellency of our strength should be dedicated to him and his service.

An early piety must needs be very acceptable and pleasing to God. Our blessed Lord took great pleasure to see little children come unto him; an emblem of the pleasure he takes that men should list themselves betimes in his service. St. John was the youngest of all the disciples, and our Saviour had a very particular kindness and affection for him; for he is said to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

It is a good sign that we value God as we ought, and have a true esteem for his service, when we can find in our hearts to give him our good days, and the years which we ourselves have pleasure in: and that we have a grateful sense of his benefits and of our mighty obligation to him, when we make the quickest and best returns we can, and think nothing too good to render to Him from whom we have received all.

It is likewise an argument of great sincerity, which is the soul of all religion and virtue, when a man devotes himself to God betimes, because it is a good evidence that he is not drawn by those forcible constraints, nor driven to God by that pressing necessity which lies upon men in time of sickness and old age. And, on the contrary, it cannot but be very displeasing to God, to be neglected by us when we are in the flower and vigour of our age; when our blood is warm and our spirits quick, and our parts are at the best, then to think ourselves too good to serve God: what an affront is this to him, who hath deserved so infinitely well of us, and beyond the best and utmost that we can possibly do?

Besides that, there is a peculiar kind of grace and

loveliness in the worthy and excellent actions of young persons, great things being hardly expected from them at that age. Early habits of virtue, like new clothes upon a young and comely body, sit very gracefully upon a straight and well-shaped mind, and do mightily become it.

As there is joy in heaven at the conversion of a great and old sinner, so it cannot but be a very delightful spectacle to God and angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, to see a young person, besieged by powerful temptations on either side, to acquit himself gloriously, and resolutely to hold out against the most violent assaults: to behold one in the prime and flower of his age, that is courted by pleasures and honours, by the devil and all the bewitching vanities of this world, to reject all these, and to cleave steadfastly to God: nay, to frown upon all these temptations, and to look down upon them with indignation and scorn, and to say, Let those doat upon these things who know no better: let them adore sensual pleasures and lying vanities, who are ignorant of the sincere and solid pleasures of religion and virtue: let them run into the arms of temptation, who can forget God their Creator, their preserver, and the guide of their youth: as for me I will serve the Lord, and will employ my whole time, either innocently or usefully, in serving God, and in doing good to men who are made after the image of God. This work shall take up my whole life, there shall be no void or empty space in it; I will endeavour, as much as possibly I can, that there may be no gap or breach in it for the devil and his temptations to enter in: Lord, I will be thine, I have chosen thee for my happiness and my portion for ever: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there

is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. Lo! they that are far from thee shall perish: but it is good for me to draw near to God;" to begin and end my days in his fear and to his glory.

Fifthly, and lastly, This age of our life may, for any thing we know, be the only time we may have for this purpose; and if we cast off the thoughts of God and defer the business of religion to old age, intending, as we pretend, to set about it at that time, we may be cut off before that time comes, and turned into hell with the people that forget God.

The work of religion is the most necessary of all other, and must be done one time or other, or we are certainly undone for ever. We cannot begin it too soon, but we may easily delay it too long; and then we are miserable past all recovery. He that would not venture his immortal soul, and put his everlasting happiness upon the greatest hazard and uncertainty, must make religion his first business and care, must think of God betimes, and "remember his Creator in the days of his youth."

I have now done with the three things which I proposed to consider from these words. The inferences from this whole discourse shall be these two:

First, To persuade those that are young to remember God their Creator, and to engage in the ways of religion and virtue betimes.

Secondly, To urge those who have neglected this first and best opportunity of their lives, to repent quickly and return to a better mind; lest the opportunity be lost for ever, and their case becomes desperate and past remedy.

First, To persuade those that are young to remember God their Creator betimes, and to engage early in the ways of religion and virtue. Do not

suffer yourselves to be cheated and bewitched by sensual satisfaction, and to be destroyed by ease and prosperity. Let not a perpetual tenor of health and pleasure soften and dissolve your spirits, and banish all wise and serious thoughts out of your minds. Be not so foolish and unworthy, as to think that you have a privilege to forget God when he is most mindful of you, when the candle of the Lord shines about your tabernacle, and you are enjoying the health, and strength, and sweetness of life.

No man knows what he does, and what an invaluable treasure he prodigally wastes, when he lets slip this golden season and opportunity of his life; whilst he is yet innocent and untainted with sin and vice, and his mind is clear of all bad impressions, and capable of the best; not enslaved to evil, and at liberty to do well.

Consider that the ways of religion and virtue are nothing so difficult and unpleasant now, as they will be hereafter; and that, the longer you forget God, and the more you are estranged from him, the more unwilling you will be to think of him and to return to him: that your lusts will every day gain more strength, and your hearts by degrees will contract such a stiffness and hardness, that it will be no easy matter to work upon them.

Therefore "remember your Creator in the days of your youth:" "to-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." When will you think of beginning a good course, if not now? You have a great work before you, which cannot be done in a little time, which cannot be begun and finished at once. Your whole life is no more than sufficient for it, to do it to the best advantage, and as it ought to be done. Do not

then think of crowding it into a corner of your life, much less of putting it off to the very end of it: when that night comes, no man can work.

Consider further; if we will deny God the hearty and vigorous service of our best days, how can we expect that he will accept the faint and flattering devotions of old age? wise men are wont to forecast and provide some stay and comfort for themselves against the evils and infirmities of that time; that they may have something to lean upon in their weakness, something to mitigate and allay the troubles and afflictions of that dark and gloomy evening: that what they cannot enjoy of present pleasure and satisfaction may in some measure be made up to them in comfortable reflections upon the past actions of a holy and innocent, an useful and well-spent life.

But, on the other hand, if we have neglected religion and forgotten God, days without number; if we have lived an ungodly and vicious life, we have treasured up so much guilt and remorse, so many aggravations of our sorrow and anguish against an evil day; and have foolishly contrived to make our burden then heaviest, when we are least able to stand under it; and have provided and laid in infinite matter for repentance, when there is hardly any space and opportunity left for the exercise of it; and when we shall be utterly disheartened from setting about so vast a work, of which we can see no end; and yet have so very little time for it, that if we do any thing at all in it we shall be forced to huddle it up in so much haste and confusion as will, I doubt, signify but very little either to our present comfort, or our future happiness.

Consider this in time, all ye that forget God in the

day of your prosperity, and in the best age of your life, and yet when the day of affliction and the infirmities of age come upon you, you will be glad then to have God mindful of you, and merciful to you. But if thou wouldst not have him cast thee off in thine old age, and forsake thee when thy strength fails, do thou remember him in the days of thy youth, in the prime and vigour of thine age: for "this is the acceptable time, this is the day of salvation."

Therefore acquaint thyself with him, and remember him now, in the days of thy youth; defer not so necessary a work, no not for one moment; begin it just now, that so thou mayst have made some good progress in it before the evil days come; before the sun, and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and all the comforts and joys of life be fled and gone.

Be not deceived, O man, whosoever thou art; for "God is not mocked." He will not be put off by us with the days in which we ourselves have no pleasure. Offer up thyself a living sacrifice, and not a carcass, if thou wouldst be accepted. Do not provoke and affront the living God by offering up to him faint spirits, and feeble hands, and dim eyes, and a dead heart. He hath been bountiful to us in giving us the best blessings of life, and all things richly to enjoy; and do we grudge him the most valuable part of our lives, and the years which we ourselves have pleasure in? do we thus requite the Lord? foolish people and unwise! Is the Giver of all good things unworthy to receive from us any thing that is good? "If we offer up the lame in sacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer up the blind, is it not evil? Offer it now to thy governor, and try if he will be pleased with thee, and accept thy person." Hath God deserved so ill at our hands, that we should forget and

neglect him? And hath the devil deserved so well of us, that we should be contented to spend the best part of our lives in his service, which is perfect slavery? Was he our Creator, or can he make us happy? Nay, does he not carry on a most malicious design to make us for ever miserable?

Secondly, Let me urge those who have neglected this first and best opportunity of their lives to repent quickly, and return to a better mind, lest all opportunity of doing it be lost for ever, and their case become desperate and past remedy. Resolve to redeem, if it be possible, the time which you should have improved: you have squandered away too much already, waste no more of this precious opportunity of life: you have deferred a necessary work too long, delay it no longer. Do not delude yourselves with vain hopes that this work may be done at any time, and in an instant; and that if you can but fashion your last breath into "Lord have mercy upon me," this will prevail with God and make atonement for the long course of a wicked and sinful life. What strange thoughts have men of God and heaven, what extravagant conceits of the little evil of sin and the great easiness of repentance, that can impose upon themselves at this rate?

Bethink yourselves better in time, consider and shew yourselves men: what will you do in the day of your distress who have neglected God in your most flourishing and prosperous condition? What will you say to him in a dying hour, who scarce ever had one serious thought of him all your life? Can you have the face at that time to bespeak him in this manner? "Lord, now the world and my lusts have left me, and I feel myself ready to sink into eternal perdition, I lay hold upon thy mercy to deliver my

soul from going down into the pit. I have heard strange things of thy goodness and that thou art merciful even to a miracle. This is that which I always trusted to, that after a long life of sin and vanity thou wouldst at last be pacified with a few penitent words and sighs at the hour of death. Let me not, I pray thee, be disappointed of this hope, and put to confusion."

Is this an address fit to be made to a wise man, much less to the all-wise and just Judge of the world? and yet this seems to be the plain interpretation of the late and forced application of a great and habitual sinner to Almighty God in his last extremity, and when he is just giving up the ghost and going to appear before his dreadful tribunal.

I say again, let no man deceive you with vain words, or with vain hopes, or with false notions of a slight and sudden repentance: as if heaven were an hospital founded on purpose to receive all sick and maimed persons, that when they can live no longer to the lusts of the flesh and the sinful pleasures of this world, can but put up a cold and formal petition to be admitted there.

No, no, as sure as God is true, they shall never see the kingdom of God, who, instead of seeking it in the first place, make it their last refuge and retreat: and, when they find themselves under the sentence of death and damnation, only to avoid present execution, and since there is no other remedy, do at last bethink themselves of getting to heaven, and fall upon their knees to petition the great Judge of the world that they may be transported thither.

Can any man in reason expect that such a petition will be granted? I tell you nay; but except you repent sooner, and at a fitter time, and after a

better fashion, you shall certainly perish. As much as God desires the salvation of men, he will not prostitute heaven, and set the gates of it wide open to those who only fly to it in extremity, but never sought it in good earnest, nor indeed do now care for it or desire it for any other reason, but to excuse them from going to hell. They have no value for heaven, because they are in no ways fit for it, but yet they think hell to be the worse place of the two.

The ever-blessed God is himself abundantly sufficient for his own happiness, and does not need our company to make any addition to it: nor yet is heaven so desolate a place, or so utterly void of inhabitants, that like some newly-discovered plantation it should be glad to receive the most vile and profligate persons, the scum and refuse of mankind. There are an innumerable company of glorious angels, much nobler creatures than the best of men, to people those blessed regions. Thousands of thousands continually stand before God, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him.

We do absolutely stand in need of God to make us happy, but he hath no need of us to help him to be so. God indeed is so good as to desire our happiness as earnestly as if it were necessary to his own: but he is happy in and from himself, and without him it is impossible we should be happy, nay, we must of necessity be for ever miserable.

To conclude: if we would have God to accept us in a dying hour, and our blessed Saviour to remember us now he is in his kingdom, let us think of him betimes, and acquaint ourselves with him that we may be at peace: "Now; before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh when we shall say, we have no pleasure in them."

"O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end." Which God of his infinite goodness grant that we may all seriously lay to heart, in this our day, and may learn betimes so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

END OF VOL. III.

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